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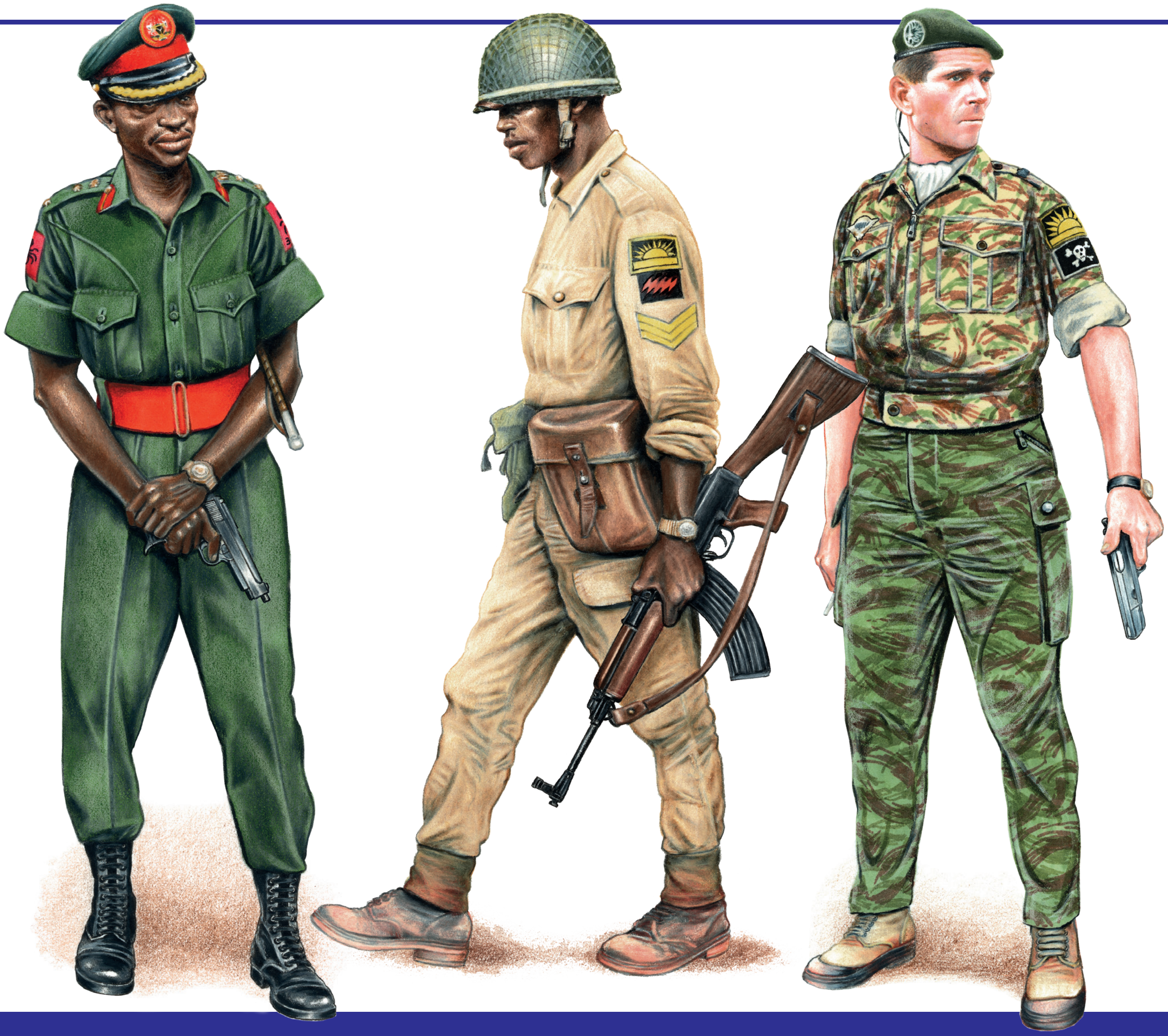
Modern African Wars (5)

The Nigerian-Biafran War 1967–70



Philip S. Jowett • Illustrated by Raffaele Ruggeri

PHILIP JOWETT was born in Leeds in 1961, and has been interested in military history for as long as he can remember. His first Osprey book was the ground-breaking Men-at-Arms 306: *Chinese Civil War Armies 1911–49*; he has since published the three-part sequence *The Italian Army 1940–45* (Men-at-Arms 340, 349 and 353). A rugby league enthusiast and amateur genealogist, he is married and lives in Lincolnshire.

RAFFAELE RUGGERI was born in Bologna where he works and lives with his wife. After studying at the Fine Arts Academy he worked in several areas of graphics and design before deciding to devote himself to illustration. He has long been interested in military history and has illustrated a number of books for Osprey, specializing in African subjects.

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Philip S. Jowett • Illustrated by Raffaele Ruggeri

Series editor Martin *Windrow*

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Dedication

The book is respectfully dedicated to Romano Cagnoni and his fellow journalists and war photographers, who at great personal risk covered the conflict in Nigeria.

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My thanks go to Peter Abbott for assistance with information on the organization and uniforms of the combatants. Special thanks to Romano Cagnoni and John De St Jorre for their kind permission to use their photographs.

Artist's Note

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raffaele.ruggeri@alice.it

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

NIGERIAN-BIAFRAN WAR 1967–70

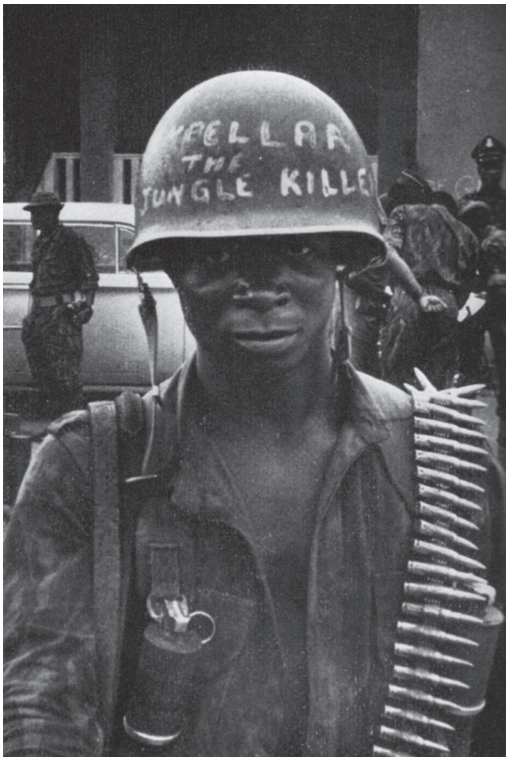
INTRODUCTION

When the large and populous West African state of Nigeria achieved independence from Britain in October 1960 the future for the country looked reasonably bright. Compared to other newly independent former colonies such as the Belgian Congo, the Federation of Nigeria was relatively stable; however, it had deep underlying tribal, political and religious tensions. Although there were up to 250 identifiably separate ethnic groups among the 25 million Nigerians, the three dominant ones were the Hausa/Fulani (Muslim – today representing some 29 per cent of Nigeria's population) in the North; the Yoruba (Muslim, Christian, animist – 21 per cent) in the West; and the Ibo or Igbo (predominantly Christian – 18 per cent) in the East. These three tribal groupings were more like nations within a nation, with several million people each. The Ibo were described by many as the most industrious and educated of the peoples that made up Nigeria, and by 1966 some 1,300,000 Easterners had moved into the North and another 500,000 into the West. Since strict Muslims had resisted European education, the Ibos tended to hold the more desirable jobs, which caused much resentment among the Northern and Western populations.

Riots in the North in 1966 caused the deaths of tens of thousands of Easterners, and some half-a-million of the survivors returned to their own region. Violent anti-Eastern feelings in the rest of the country only served to encourage an Ibo secessionist movement seeking to break away from Nigeria – an ambition shared by the military governor of the Eastern Region, Col Ojukwu. With identified oil reserves and a motivated population behind them, Ojukwu and his supporters thought that an independent East would be a viable state of 7 million. For his part, the newly installed military leader of Nigeria, MajGen Yakubu Gowon, was determined that his country should remain united.

The Eastern Region proclaimed its independence in May 1967, as the Republic of Biafra (named after the Bight of Biafra off its coast). The Nigerian Federal government immediately declared that this secession would be opposed by military means, and a civil war to reunify the country was now inevitable. Although disapproving in principle of a regime installed by military coup, Britain supported its aim of national unity, and quietly increased military aid to the Federal government.

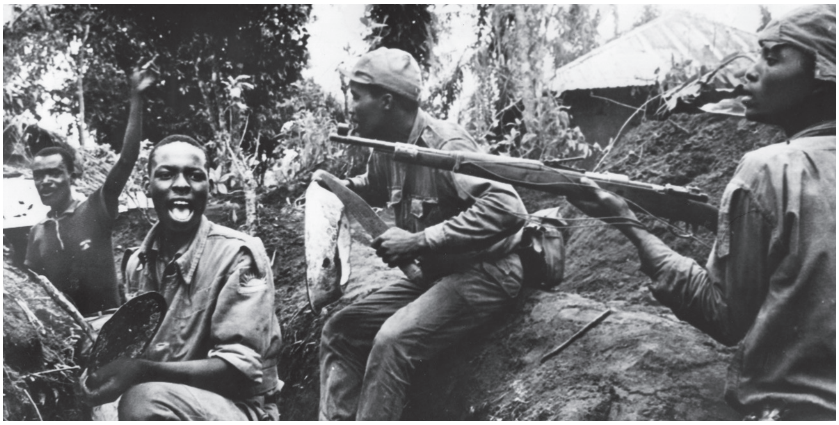
Soldiers of both sides often painted slogans or 'battle names' on their helmets, and this menacing Federal infantryman clearly wants the world to know who he is: 'Bellar the Jungle Killer'. He is wearing a camouflage jacket, and has a British smoke grenade hanging from the shoulder yoke of his 58-pattern webbing. Many photos show Federal troops draped with belts of link for their section machine guns. (John De St Jorre)



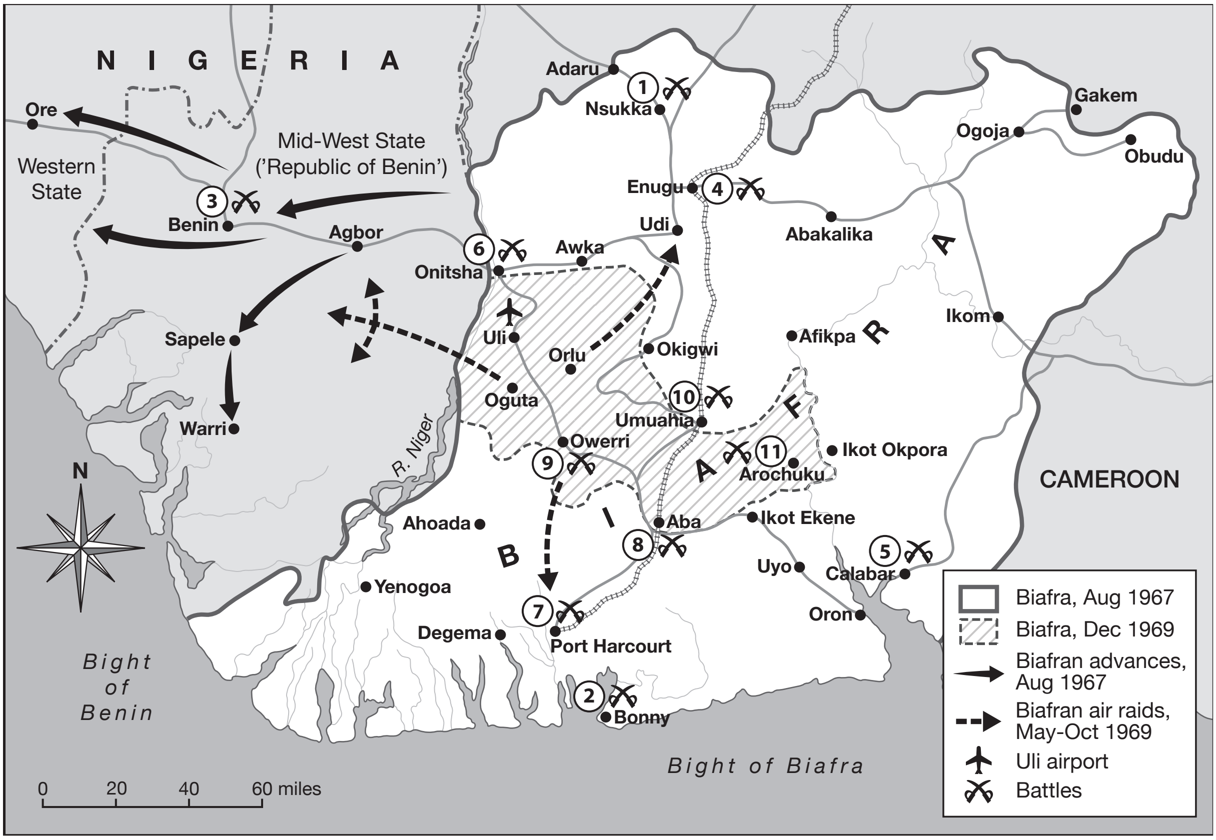
CHRONOLOGY

A soldier of the Federal Army checks the identity papers of a civilian in the Nigerian capital, Lagos, during the military coup of January 1966. From that July the counter-coup against the Ibo-dominated government of Gen Ironsi would lead to widespread massacres of his fellow tribesmen, persuading many Nigerians from the East that their future lay outside the Federation. Both sentries are armed with FN FAL semi-automatic rifles (British SLRs); they wear khaki-drill cotton uniforms, British web equipment, and US M1-style helmets or liners. (Private collection)

1960, 1 October	Nigeria gains its independence from Great Britain.
1960–65	The first years of independence are marked by a series of political crises before the first free election is held in December 1964. The electoral victory of a Northern-dominated party is challenged by politicians from the South and West. Divisions along tribal and regional lines are made worse by rigged elections in the West in October 1965. Political power-struggles between groups in the North, West and South of the country make civilian rule increasingly ineffective and vulnerable.
1966, 15 January	Northern military coup led by Maj Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu overthrows the corrupt and ineffective civilian government, with many deaths among Nigerian politicians, officials and military officers. The coup is only partially successful, however, and when it runs out of steam the Army chief-of-staff, the Ibo MajGen Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, takes power at the head of a Supreme Military Council including senior officers from all regions (including Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, from the South-East). The young LtCol Yakubu Gowon, who has just returned from staff college training in Britain, is promoted colonel as Ironsi's chief-of-staff. (Like Gen Ironsi and Col Ojukwu, Gowon is a veteran of United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Congo.)
29 July	Military counter-coup launched against the Ibo-dominated regime; many Ibo officers are killed, including Gen Ironsi. Junior officers name MajGen Gowon as his successor, at the head of a Northern-dominated military government.
September–October	Series of anti-Ibo pogroms, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 30,000 or even 50,000 Ibos and other Easterners. Perhaps 600,000 Easterners flee to their home region for safety, bringing tales of



Biafran troops in a front-line trench near the city of Aba in August 1968 use a desperate method to try to keep the Nigerians at bay. While one man covers them with his Mauser rifle the others bang pots and pans in order to try to give the impression of a more strongly manned position. In a colour version of this photograph all the men are wearing olive-brown uniforms. (Private collection)


N I G E R I A
Ore
Western State
Mid-West State ('Republic of Benin')
3
Benin
Agbor
Sapele
Warri
R. Niger
N
Bight of Benin
0
20
40
60 miles
Adaru
1
Nsukka
Enugu
4
Udi
Abakalika
6
Onitsha
Awka
Uli
Orlu
Okigwi
Oguta
10
Umuahia
Owerri
9
11
Arochuku
Ikot Okpora
Ahoada
Aba
8
Ikot Ekene
Yenogoa
7
Degema
Port Harcourt
2
Bonny
Uyo
5
Calabar
Oron
Afikpa
Ikom
Ogoja
Gakem
Obudu
CAMEROON
B I A F R A
Bight of Biafra
Biafra, Aug 1967
Biafra, Dec 1969
Biafran advances, Aug 1967
Biafran air raids, May-Oct 1969
Uli airport
Battles

Sketch map of the theatre of war, 1967–70.
(1) Federal capture of Nsukka, July 1967
(2) Federal capture of Bonny, July 1967
(3) Biafran capture of Benin, Aug 1967
(4) Federal capture of Enugu, Oct 1967
(5) Federal capture of Calabar, Oct 1967
(6) Biafrans hold Onitsha, Oct 1967; falls to Federal Army, March 1968
(7) Federal capture of Port Harcourt, May 1968
(8) Federal capture of Aba, Sept 1968
(9) Federal capture of Owerri, Sept 1968; Biafran recapture, April 1969
(10) Federal capture of Umuahia, April 1969
(11) Federal capture of Arochuku, Jan 1970
(Map by JB Illustration)

outrages suffered in the North. In response the military governor of the Eastern Region, Col Ojukwu, seizes Federal assets and prepares to expel Northerners from the region.

1967:
January Colonel Ojukwu imports two shiploads of small arms which are transported to a secret holding area. The Gowon government begins to import armaments from Italy, which Ojukwu complains are intended only for non-Eastern units.

27 May Major-General Gowon declares a state of emergency and assumes full powers as chief-of-staff of the Federal Army and head of the military government. This announces the reorganization of Nigeria's three regions into 12 states in an attempt to forestall a declaration of independence by the East. The Eastern Region is to be divided into the non-Ibo Rivers and South-Eastern states, which have the main oil reserves and sea access, isolating the Ibo heartland as East-Central State.

30 May After many months of posturing, Col Ojukwu formally announces the secession of the East from the Federation, and declares the Republic of Biafra.

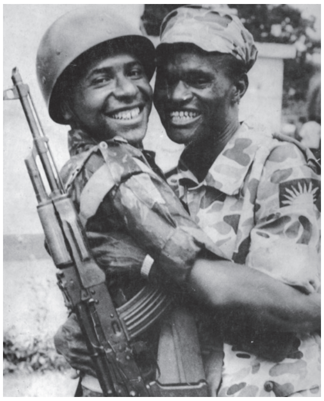
7 July First armed clashes take place between small units on the northern Biafran front.

Three commanders of Biafra's mercenary-led 4th Cdo Div photographed outside Federal-held Onitsha shortly before their doomed attacks on 12–13 November 1968. (Left) Marc Goosens, who would be killed later that day leading a near-suicidal attack by his Abaliki Strike Force. (Centre, in helmet and goggles) 'Taffy' Williams, commander of the Guards unit and now the whole formation. (Right, sucking a straw) Armand Ianarelli, commanding the Ahoada Strike Force. Both Williams and Ianarelli were to continue their service with the Biafrans until the following year, but only in a training role. (Private collection)

July	Biafran towns of Ogoja and Nsukka fall to Federal 1st Division.
25 July	Federal 3rd Division lands at Bonny Island in the South-West Delta region of Biafra.
8 August	The Biafrans launch a surprise invasion of the Mid-Western Region, with about 1,000 men crammed into requisitioned civilian vehicles, improvised armoured cars and trucks; their lightning thrust along two lines of advance takes the Mid-West regional capital, Benin, the next day. A pro-Biafran 'Republic of Benin' is proclaimed by Biafran officers of Mid-Western origin, but it fails to gain local support. Southern Biafra operations by Federal 3rd Marine Div halted as focus shifts to Mid-West.
29 August	Biafran advance into Western State is halted by Federal forces at the city of Ore, only 130 miles from Lagos. Subsequently the capital is raided by a Biafran B-26, causing minimal damage but widespread panic.
September	The rebel column is driven back into Biafran territory. The Federal 3rd Marine Div captures Owerri (16th).
4 October	The Biafran capital, Enugu, falls to the Federal 1st Div; rebel government moves to Umuahia.
12 October	About 5,000 men from Federal 2nd Div briefly occupy Onitsha after amphibious attack across River Niger, where Biafrans have destroyed bridge, but they are driven out with heavy loss by Biafran 11th and 18th Battalions.
18–20 October	Federal 3rd Marine Div shipped from Bonny to Calabar, which is defended by Biafran 9th Bn; fall of port compromises Biafran access to neighbouring Cameroon. Subsequent mercenary-led counterattack fails.
1968:	
	During the spring Biafra is recognized by several sympathetic African states: Tanzania (13 April), Gabon (8 May), Ivory Coast (15 May) and Zambia (20 May). Thereafter pressure from the Organization of African Unity, which supports Nigeria, prevents any further recognitions. The Biafran civilian population begin to starve to death in large numbers as the year progresses. By July 3,000 people are estimated to be dying daily, rising to a staggering 6,000 per day during August.
March	Federal offensive is launched to capture Onitsha from Biafran 11th Div; city falls to Federal 2nd Div (26th).
May	Peace talks are held in Kampala, Zambia.
19 May	Federal 3rd Marine Div captures Port Harcourt,

Biafran soldiers photographed just after they have successfully ambushed a Federal Army patrol in 1969. Their captives have already been stripped of their uniforms and equipment, which has been shared out; the central man has slung over his shoulder the boots taken from the naked Nigerian soldier lying on the track. This unit is relatively well clothed, equipped and armed for 1969, showing that not all Biafran soldiers were dressed in rags. (Private collection)

	thus cutting Biafra's main access to the sea and costing it a major airport.
19 June	Amphibious force from Federal 3rd Marine Div captures the port of Degema.
15 July	Peace talks in Ivory Coast, sponsored by Organization of African Unity, lead to an agreement to hold further talks in Ethiopia.
4 September	Federal 3rd Marine Div captures Aba.
15 September	Biafrans recapture Oguta.
17 September	Federal Army captures Owerri.
November	Rolf Steiner and other mercenaries are expelled from Biafra (10th). Biafrans launch Operation 'Hiroshima', with a 4th Cdo Div frontal assault against Onitsha; it fails (12th–13th), with 50 per cent casualties.
1969:	
March	Caribbean state of Haiti extends diplomatic recognition to Biafra (23rd). Owerri partly retaken by Biafran 14th Div (31st).
April	At the start of the month Federal Army launches new offensive towards Umuahia.
22 April	Umuahia falls to Federal Army.
29 April	Biafran morale is lifted when starving Federal forces holding Owerri withdraw 'for tactical reasons' and Biafran 14th Div occupies the town.
9 May	Biafran guerrillas kill 11 Italian oilmen at Okpai in the Mid-West, reducing international sympathy for the Biafran cause.
May	Colonel Adekunle is relieved of command of Federal 3rd Marine Division.
11 May	Colonel Ojukwu promotes himself to Biafran rank of general.



Former enemies embrace for the cameras at a Biafran surrender ceremony at Owerri in January 1970. This photo is obviously posed for propaganda purposes, but – surprisingly for such a bitterly fought conflict – in the early post-war years the reconciliation promoted by Gen Gowon seems to have been generally successful, and few reprisals were reported. The Nigerian soldier (left) is wearing the liner from one of the NATO copies of the M1 helmet, and is armed with a Soviet AKM assault rifle. The Biafran, a member of Gen Effiong's escort, wears one of the large number of locally made uniforms produced in 'duck-hunter' camouflage in the last year of the war, complete with a field cap with fold-up earflaps. (Peter Obe)

22–24 May	Several Biafran air strikes are launched for the first time by Count von Rosen's 'Minicon' aircraft against Federal targets. These will continue into the autumn, causing disruption to the oil industry and destroying Nigerian Air Force aircraft on the ground.
30 May	After two years of war Biafran territory has shrunk to 10 per cent of its pre-war size, with an estimated 6 million people crowded within its borders.
June	Biafra launches offensives on several fronts, and guerrilla activity in the Mid-West leads to the deployment of six Federal battalions to the region.
August	It is reported that up to this month, Biafran battle casualties had reached 36,000 men. The Biafrans are mentally and physically exhausted, having fought an unequal struggle for more than two years.
September	One of the last Biafran offensives, in the Owerri sector, involves 4,000 troops in four brigades plus one battalion.
17 November	The Nigerian chief-of-staff orders the Federal Army to 'liberate what is left of the rebel-held areas'. Preparations begin for what it is hoped will be the final Federal offensive.
1970:	
7 January	Federal Army launches Operation 'Tailwind' against the remaining Biafran-held territory; within days the remaining enclave is cut in two.
9 January	Biafran chief-of-staff LtGen Philip Effiong succeeds Ojukwu as head of state, by agreement.
10 January	Federal forces capture towns of Arochuku, Utoru and Ohafia as Biafran resistance collapses.
11 January	General Ojukwu and his entourage escape by air to Libreville in Gabon.
12 January	Biafran Army lays down its arms after Gen Effiong announces capitulation over the radio.
15 January	Official surrender ceremony of Biafran armed forces is conducted by Gen Effiong at Dodan Barracks in Lagos.

Total battle casualties on both sides during the war were estimated at somewhere between 90,000 and 120,000 men, but the greatest losses were suffered by the civilian population of Biafra. Although some civilians died in air raids and thousands from disease, the vast majority of deaths were from starvation – estimates vary between 1 and 2 million.

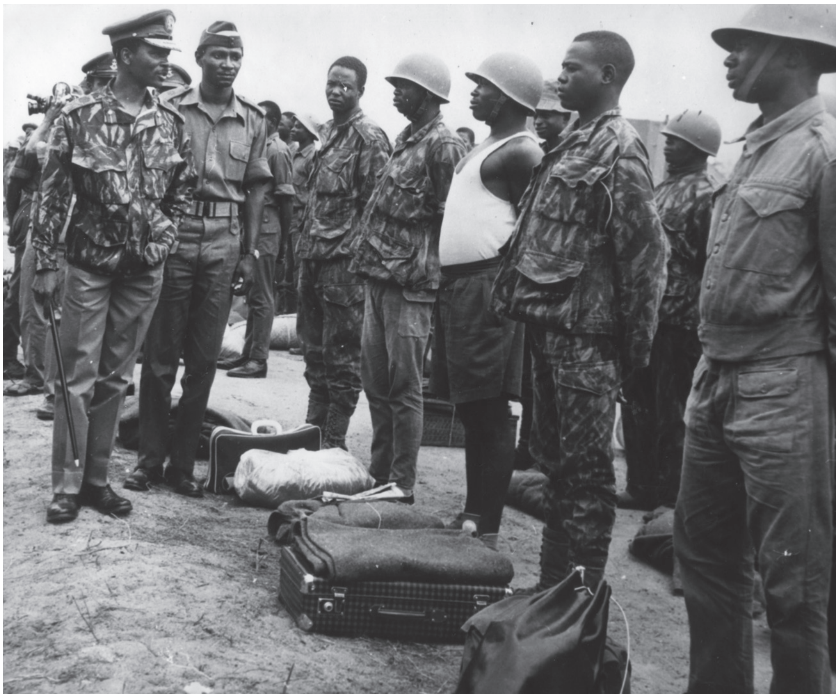
NIGERIAN FEDERAL ARMY

The Federal Army began the war with a strength of about 8,000–10,000 men in two brigades each of three battalions. Major-General Gowon described the early Federal offensives against the Biafrans as a 'police action', confidently stating that the Nigerian Army was sufficiently strong and well-armed to deal with the rebellion. As the conflict escalated into full-scale war the army obviously needed to be expanded, but while this was achieved rapidly it was badly co-ordinated. By late 1968 the Federal Army reached a strength of between 80,000 and 120,000 men; during the following year the expansion gathered pace, and by the end of hostilities in January 1970 it had reached at least 180,000. (Other estimates gave it a strength by 1970 of as many as 250,000 men, but this may have included the numerous hangers-on who attached themselves to the army during the war.)

The army began the war with six infantry battalions, and a further four battalions were quickly formed from World War II veterans (see below). Most of these units fought on the northern Biafran front in the first months of the war as 1st Brigade, but as army expansion got under way divisional formations were organized. By late 1967 the Federal Army was loosely organized into three numbered infantry divisions, which operated throughout the war as effectively independent commands.

The divisions

The 1st Division had a strength of as many as 40,000 men organized into six infantry brigades, and incorporated the majority of the pre-1967 army; it earned a reputation for reliability, and usually managed to complete its missions. Unlike the other two formations the 1st Div was also known for a degree of professional 'spit and polish' and for maintaining good discipline. One distinct advantage was that it received many of the World War II veterans who signed up to fight in 1967. These men had fought under British command in 23rd (Nigerian) Bde against the Italians in East Africa in 1941, and in 81st and 82nd (West African) Divs against the Japanese in Burma in 1944–45. Though now aged in their 40s, they were still proud of their part in the Allied victory on one



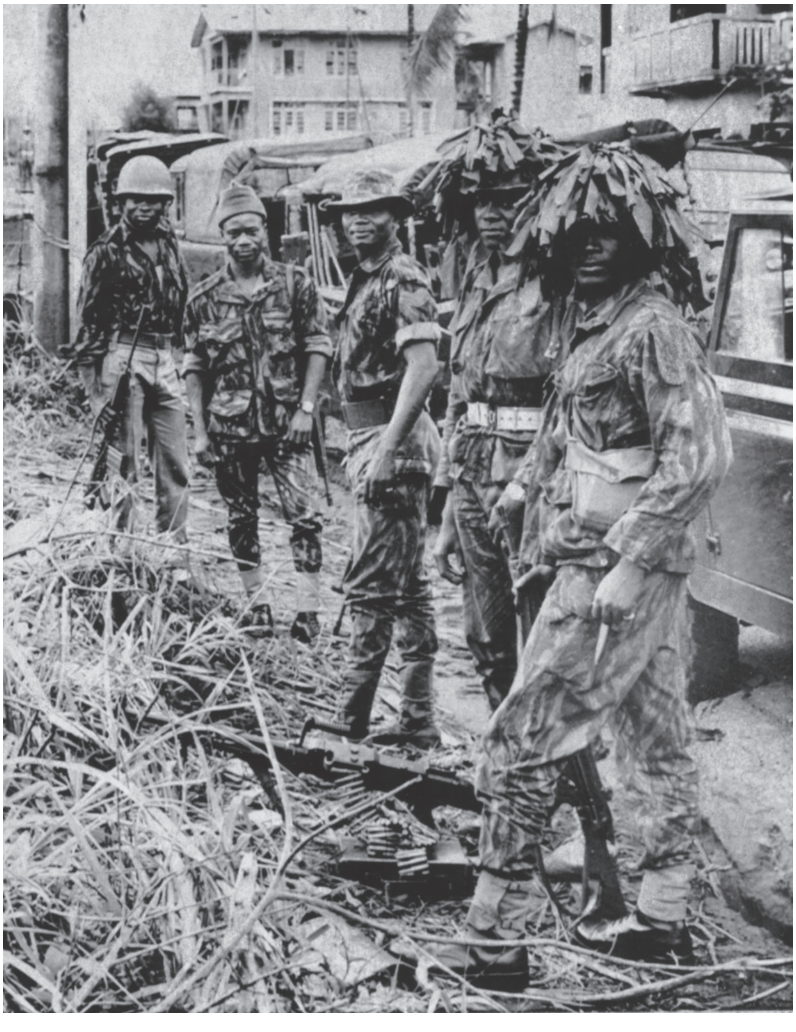
Major-General Yakubu 'Jack' Gowon (left), the 32-year-old Nigerian leader, inspects newly arrived recruits in the early days of the civil war. While both were veterans of UN operations in the Congo, in character Gowon was the polar opposite of the flamboyant Ojukwu, who was the Oxford-educated son of a self-made millionaire. Coming from a humbler family background, Gowon was nevertheless a graduate of RMA Sandhurst and a British Army staff college course; once in command, he would go quietly about the business of running the Federal Army despite all the difficulties he faced. The recruits here are wearing a mix of Nigerian 'lizard' camouflage and jungle-green uniforms, and only about half of them have been issued with helmets. (Private collection)

of the war's most punishing fronts, and brought to the ranks valuable military experience and culture. They proudly stated that they needed 'guns, but no training'; out of the 20,000 ex-soldiers who were willing to fight the Biafrans, 7,000 of the fittest were selected, and 5,000 were sent straight to the front.

The 2nd Division, by contrast, was a hodge-podge of units including Police and other para-military forces, which had been hastily formed to defend the Mid-West region from the Biafran invasion in 1967. With a strength of 20,000 men in three infantry brigades, the 2nd was the weakest of the Federal divisions. After repulsing the invasion of the Mid-West its morale was badly damaged when it was sent to capture the town of Onitsha. In three large-scale attacks the division suffered heavy casualties, and although it eventually took the town this battle left its troops exhausted and demoralized. Its lack of progress during the war earned it the nickname 'Tortoise Division'. Once it had captured Onitsha it was isolated from the other theatres of the war, and was hardly employed again until the final 1970 offensive.

The 3rd Division was formed from the Lagos Garrison Organization (throughout this text we use its later designation 'Marine'). At its peak it had a strength of approximately 35,000 men formed into eight 'commando brigades' of various strengths. The division had an elite reputation, which was not always earned: much of its renown was built around the persona of its commanding officer, Col Benjamin Adekunle (see Plate C1). Adekunle was an eccentric egoist who sought to monopolize much of the media attention given to the Federal Army in 1967–68. His command's 'gung-ho' attitude carried it through its early actions even though it then lacked artillery or armoured vehicles. All three divisional commanders were replaced in 1969 as part of a re-organization of the Federal Army; in Adekunle's case, his erratic behaviour in front of journalists and visiting foreign observers had become an embarrassment for Gen Gowon.

Although the three divisions were infantry formations they were each supposed to have the support of a reconnaissance squadron, an artillery battery



Federal troops pose alongside their Land Rovers, showing a variety of weaponry and uniforms. The visible weapons are FN FAL and H&K G3 rifles, and a couple of L7A2 general-purpose machine guns (GPMGs). The uniforms are mainly of Nigerian vertically striped camouflage cloth, while headgear includes M1-style helmets, a bush hat, and a knitted woollen 'cap, comforter'. The officer (in bush hat, centre) sports the broad red canvas stable belt worn by some Federal infantry officers with combat uniform; compare with Plate C1. (Private collection)

and an engineer squadron. Finding personnel for these support units was a problem, especially in the early stages of the war. The Nigerians had formed their first armoured unit in 1958, before independence, by converting an artillery battery into a recce company equipped with Ferret scout cars. By 1962 it was renamed 1st Recce Sqn, and in 1963 it received a few additional Saladin heavy armoured cars; Saracen APCs were also supplied at a later date. A 2nd Sqn was formed in 1965, and a 3rd in 1968 to support the 3rd Marine Division. As more armoured vehicles were acquired the three squadrons were nominally converted into regiments.

LEFT **A devout Muslim corporal (note end of white chevrons, far left) prays before going into action; he wears British 1958 webbing over his khaki-drill uniform shirt. Although he may be too young to have served in World War II he could well be an ex-soldier of the pre-1960 colonial forces, returned to the colours in 1967. (Private collection)**

RIGHT **This Nigerian soldier about to go out on patrol is photographed with his equipment carried African-style on top of his head; it is doubtful that he really intends to 'go tactical' with his haversack and tin cup balanced so precariously. The light-coloured lanyard worn around the left shoulder of his camouflage smock is unidentified. (John De St Jorre)**

While there were occasional reports of large numbers of mercenaries on both sides during the civil war, it was mainly the Biafrans who employed them. However, there were reported to be 'foreign' volunteers in the Federal Army from both neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic; whether they actually came from those countries or had been settled in northern Nigeria when the war broke out is open to question. In August 1967 a reported 170 Soviet technicians arrived in Nigeria to help familiarize the Federal Army and Air Force with new weaponry. Most advisors returned to the Soviet Union within months once they had fulfilled this task, but unconfirmed reports persisted throughout the war of the Nigerians having front-line advisors from the Warsaw Pact, as well as officers seconded from the British Army.

Performance

Some commentators have criticized the vastly superior Nigerian Army for the time it took to defeat the smaller and poorly armed Biafran Army. In reality the civil war was not the simple 'David vs Goliath' conflict beloved by journalists, and the Nigerian side was handicapped by many weaknesses.

The Federal Army's rapid wartime expansion 'on paper' caused major shortages of both equipment and trained manpower. When the war began one of the most pressing needs was for officers. The army started the war with only seven high-ranking officers, since all the others had either died in the 1966 coup and counter-coup or had gone over to the Biafrans. In a desperate effort to increase the numbers, emergency commissions were given to any who had served in the British West African forces since 1939 and who were under the age of 50; after going through a 'crash' officers' training course, such veterans were rushed to front-line units. As the majority of the officers in the technical and medical branches in the pre-1967 army had been Ibos, the Federal Army started the war with only 12 military doctors; they had to bring in foreign volunteers at short notice, mostly from Algeria.

The rapid expansion of the army also led, unsurprisingly, to a dilution in the standard of recruits. In the rush to enlarge the army, recruits received only six weeks' training and arrived at the front line unprepared for combat. After an initial burst of enthusiasm among the Nigerian population the flow of volunteers also began to dry up, and in December 1968 it was decided that a general mobilization might be necessary.

Even the positive influx of World War II veterans in 1967 was not without its problems. While these men constantly complained about the unprofessional attitudes of their younger comrades, they themselves were prone to various ailments during the rainy seasons. Having no spare dry clothing to change into, these middle-aged men were especially susceptible to bronchial problems, including pneumonia.

Disunity of command

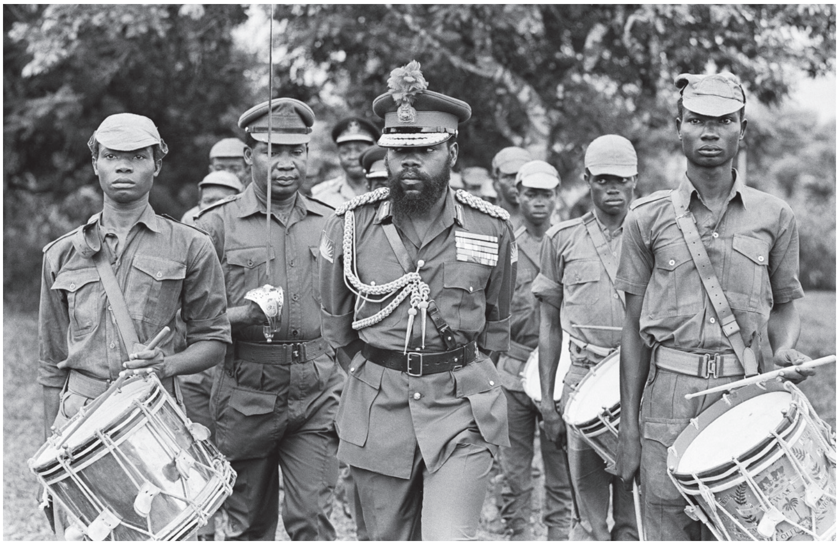
A lack of unity of purpose between the three divisions was also to hamper the army throughout the war. With such great distances between their respective areas of operations, the three divisional commanders operated more or less like feudal warlords. They had complete power over the forces under their command, and even had their own arms and equipment procurement budgets. Commanders sent their own overseas purchasing teams to dealers in Europe and the USA, and when arms and other war supplies arrived at a port a 'first up the gangplank' rule applied: all three divisions had logistics teams at each port, and whichever troops got to the cargo first claimed it for their command. Rivalry between divisions also led to the 'press-ganging' of recruits who were already assigned to other units. This rivalry was particularly fierce between the 1st and 3rd Divs, which continued to clash even after Biafra's defeat in 1970.

There was also a lack of trust between front-line and rear-area officers. Many front-line officers criticized their colleagues at the Army Command in Lagos for extending the war for corrupt reasons, claiming that the cowardly 'bigwigs' at HQ were purposely starving them of supplies. Staff officers countered with claims that the front-line commanders were wasting huge quantities of arms and ammunition.

BIAFRAN ARMY

At the outset of the war the Biafran Army had a strength of between 5,000 and 7,000 men, but only a small minority were armed with modern weapons. Although a number of officers had joined the Biafran Army from the Federal Army there were few career enlisted men; when Federal Army personnel of Northern and Western origin had left the East before the war began, they reportedly left only 240 troops in barracks. In the first few months the Biafran Army was really only a skeleton force beefed up with local militia.

The only organized units in 1967 were the 1st, 7th and 8th Battalions, which were soon joined by new 9th and 14th Bns. The 8th and 9th Bns formed the 52nd Brigade to defend the south, and the 1st, 7th and 14th Bns formed the 51st Bde to defend the northern front. As the war developed the army was expanded, but effective strength was always limited by the arms available.



The bearded Col Chukwuemeka (‘Emeka’) Odumegwu Ojukwu, the 34-year-old leader of Biafra, inspects some of his ‘S’ Brigade troops in the summer of 1967. The son of one of the richest men in Nigeria, he was educated mainly in England. After gaining a master’s degree in history from Lincoln College, Oxford, he was commissioned from the Mons officer cadet school in 1958; eight years later he was a lieutenant-colonel, commanding the Nigerian 5th Battalion. Here he wears green parade dress with embellishments suitable to his cult of personality: a red-and-white feather hackle on his cap, gold staff shoulder cords and aiguillettes, and five full rows of medal ribbons. He is accompanied by a drum band, whose drums are leftovers from the pre-independence era; under magnification they seem to bear insignia of the West African Frontier Force. (Mirrorpix)

A Biafran battalion had a theoretical strength of 600 men; three battalions made up a brigade, three of which made up a division with a nominal strength of 5,400 men. At one time during the war there were four divisions: the 11th, 12th, 13th (later renumbered 15th) and the 14th. In addition, a 101st Div was formed for the Mid-West invasion in 1967, and was disbanded after its failure. Additionally to the four divisions, which totalled some 21,000 men, there were two separate brigades: the ‘S’ Bde, and the 4th Commando Bde (see below), both of which were later redesignated as divisions. The rest of the army was made up of a mixed group of so-called brigades, ‘special attack’ forces and battalions formed on an *ad hoc* basis, often only for the duration of a single operation.

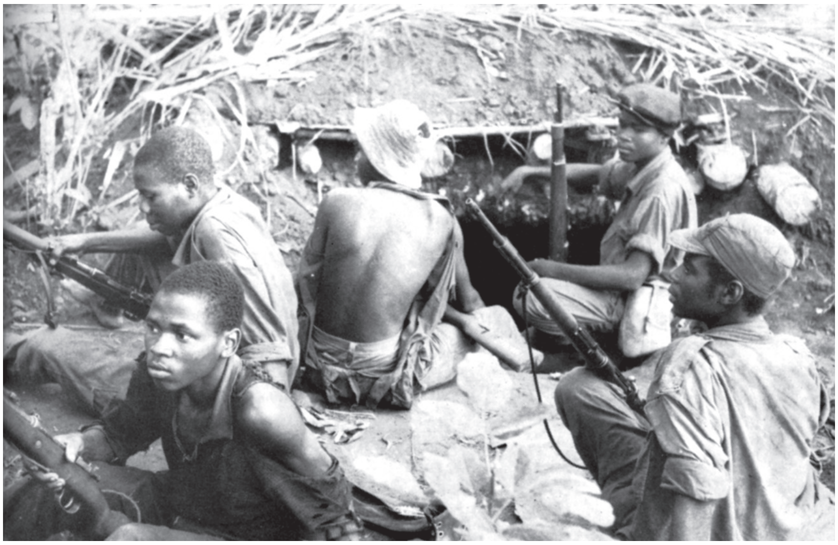
At its largest the Biafran Army was reported to have had a strength of 40,000 men including limited support branches. Supply, transport and logistics services were initially provided (ineffectively) by semi-civilian directorates run largely by civil servants, but a Service Corps was formed later in the war.

During the war the Biafrans managed to train a total of 10,000 new officers to replace losses. This averaged out at 300 officers per month, which was a great achievement for the training schools, but the constraints of the war meant that officer cadets often had to be sent to the front before their training was completed. In a vicious circle, the under-trained officers and the men they led thus suffered even heavier casualties.

‘S’ Brigade/Division

A perceived threat to Col Ojukwu from his some of his own officers led him to form a bodyguard force from loyal troops. Most of its soldiers came from the ranks of the Militia, so were regarded as ‘untainted’ by the possible disloyalty of former Federal Army personnel. There was a great deal of resentment between the ‘S’ Bde and other formations of the Biafran Army, who nicknamed it the ‘Silly’ or ‘Sulky’ Brigade. Other officers were initially jealous of Ojukwu’s perceived favouritism to the brigade in the supply of arms and equipment. The brigade was expanded into a division in mid-1968, and by 1969, having proved its mettle in action, it was a fully accepted part of the regular army.

Biafran soldiers sit outside their strongpoint in one of the defence lines built on the approaches to a town. With few heavy weapons available, trench systems like this were often defended by small numbers of troops armed only with elderly Mauser rifles. In most cases each man would be given only a handful of cartridges – for a defensive action, often not even a full clip of five rounds. (Private collection)

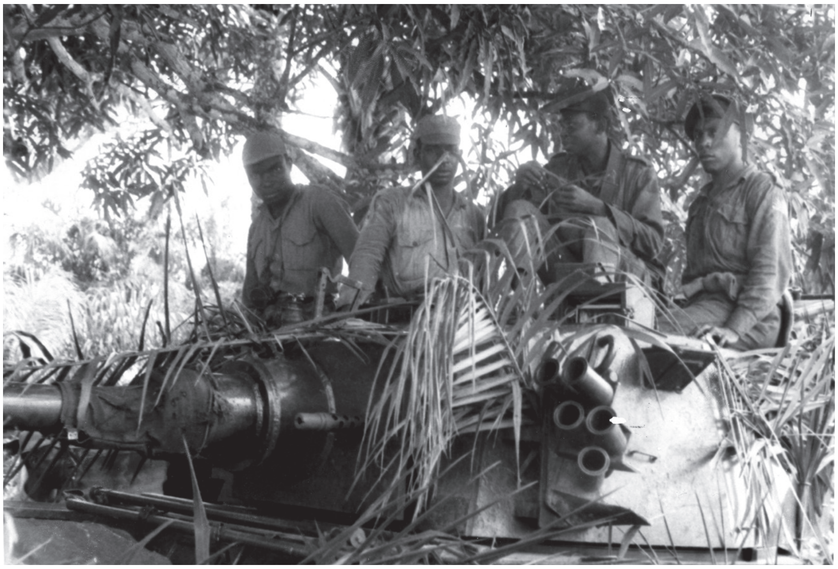


Militia, 1967–68

As the new state tried to create military forces to resist any attempt to crush their secession a series of local 'peoples' militias' were raised. The first significant force was organized in Port Harcourt, and others were soon raised in the cities of Aba, Enugu, Umuahia and Onitsha. Militiamen and women were given basic training in the evenings and at weekends, the training course officially lasting four weeks. They were armed mostly with wooden practice rifles or staves, and only a minority had so-called 'Dane guns' crudely made in local workshops, or imported shotguns. A handful of Lee–Enfields and some imported Czech rifles were also issued to militiamen, but these were probably subsequently recalled for issue to the Biafran Army, and many militiamen ended up armed only with machetes.

In its early days the role of the Militia was to man roadblocks and to search for enemy infiltrators. Even though the organization had a relatively short lifespan a new system of ranks was introduced for its

Despite their persistent shortage of suitable munitions, the Biafrans did sometimes manage to disable or trap and capture Nigerian AFVs; here the new Biafran crew of a Saladin armoured car pose proudly in March 1969. Whenever it was possible to get them back into serviceable condition such captures were turned against the Federal Army, and were sometimes decisive in tactical victories; the Saladin's medium-velocity L5A1 76mm gun was an effective weapon, with the capacity for high explosive and anti-personnel canister rounds. (Private collection)



officers. The lowest officer rank was sub-patroller (equivalent to an army second lieutenant); in ascending order the other ranks were patroller-lieutenant, chief patroller, tracker, and tracker-major (equivalent to an army lieutenant-colonel).

BOFF

The Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters was created as a guerrilla force to fight behind Nigerian lines. It was inspired by the Viet Cong who were at that period world famous for fighting the US and South Vietnamese forces. Ojukwu's intention was that these 'rangers' would employ hit-and-run tactics against the Federal Army's over-extended supply lines, applying enough pressure to force the Nigerians to come to a negotiated settlement.

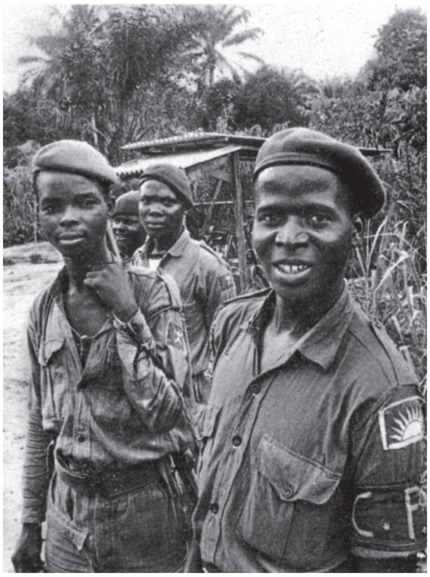
Mercenaries: 4th Commando Brigade/Division

Following the relative success of units of white mercenaries in the Congo between 1960 and 1967 it was to be expected that some would appear in Nigeria, and between late 1967 and mid-1969 several groups did indeed operate there with varying success. The main cause of their ultimate failure was Biafra's chronic lack of weapons, particularly of bazookas and mortars, and of ammunition. (In the Congo the success of mercenary-led units had been due to logistic support from the Belgian Army.)

In late 1967, when the war was going badly for Biafra, Col Ojukwu was persuaded to recruit a group of white mercenaries led by the French former Foreign Legion paratroop officer Roger Faulques. He brought with him 53 mercenaries, who were intended to raise and provide the cadre for a crack Biafran force. After a disastrous unauthorized attack against the recently-lost port of Calabar, Faulques and most of this first group departed, leaving only a handful to continue the fight. The leader of this remainder was Rolf Steiner, a German ex-corporal of Legion paratroopers, who proved himself in several actions before being given command of a new unit with the rank of major. This 4th Commando Bde was recruited locally but officered by mercenaries, such as Giorgio Norbiato, an Italian veteran of the Congo; Johnny Erasmus, a Rhodesian explosives expert; and 'Taffy' Williams, a Welsh-born South African. Others in this exotic group were Alexander Gay, a Glaswegian veteran of Jean Schramme's 'Leopard Bn' in the Congo; Louis 'Paddy' Malrooney, a 54-year-old Irishman; a Corsican ex-légionnaire, Armand Iaranelli; and 'Johnny Korea', a Jamaican former bartender. With their support, Steiner led his 4th Cdo Bde in several operations against the Federal Army in 1968, but these were extremely costly.

The brigade had an initial strength of about 5,000, mostly divided between three battalions at least 1,000 strong: Ahoada Strike Force led by Ianarelli; Abaliki Strike Force led by Erasmus; and the Guards led by Williams. Its Biafran recruits showed high morale and regarded themselves as an elite, wearing their skull-and-crossbones shoulder patch with pride. Although intermittently

A group of international mercenaries in the cadre of the Biafran 4th Cdo Div gather around a map before an action to try to regain the town of Onitsha from the Federal Army in November 1968; the photographer helpfully wrote their names around the edge of the photograph. They are, clockwise from bottom left: the Welsh-born South African 'Taffy' Williams, the Flemish Belgian Marc Goosens, the enormous Frenchman 'Tiny Bill' Billois, an unknown mercenary called Boucher, and the Corsican Armand Iaranelli. (Private collection)



Soldiers of the Biafran 4th Cdo Bde or Div are seen at a checkpoint, with a guard (foreground) from the unit HQ. The commandos are distinguishable by the skull-and-crossbones patches on their sleeves; the headquarters guard wears a black brassard with the white letters 'CP' for Command Post. All clearly wear coloured berets, but not battalion neckerchiefs. (Private collection)

successful, 4th Cdo suffered a very high casualty rate; for instance, the battle to hold Aba, lost on 4 September 1968, cost the unit all but 922 from a starting strength of 3,742 men. Nevertheless, in early October it was redesignated a division, and Steiner told a journalist that he had 8,500 men (but only 1,000 rifles).

Steiner's overconfidence became delusional, and his resentment of the orders he received from Ojukwu's staff culminated in a confrontation which resulted in his expulsion from Biafra on 10 November 1968. When Steiner departed only Iaranelli, Williams, one Frenchman and a few Belgians were left to lead the formation. One of the Belgians, Marc Goosens, was killed virtually on camera during a hopeless attempt to retake Onitsha by a frontal attack in November 1968. This ended the mercenaries' involvement in battle, with the remaining few seeing out their contracts in the training role.

OTHER SERVICES

Nigerian Navy

The Nigerian Navy was formed in 1956, equipped with 11 small vessels of which only one was an armed patrol craft. In 1964 orders were placed with the Netherlands for a frigate, the NNS *Nigeria*, and a submarine chaser, the NNS *Enugu*; at about the same time Nigeria purchased an ex-US Navy patrol craft named the NNS *Ogoja*. In 1968 the Soviet Union supplied the Navy with three coastal patrol vessels, and by 1970 the Navy had grown to a strength of 2,000 men with 15 vessels, including two minesweepers, seven seaward defence vessels and one tank landing craft.

The Navy's main role during the civil war was to impose a naval blockade on the Biafran coast. This was generally achieved; several gun-running ships were intercepted, denying their precious cargoes to the Biafrans. The Navy also took part in several amphibious landings to take Biafran ports along the southern coast, of which the most notable were the July 1967 landing of the Federal 3rd Marine Div at Bonny Island and the capture of a string of other harbours that September.

Rear-Admiral Akinwale Wey, Chief of Naval Staff, in a formal portrait of 1968. He wears the British-style white summer version of the Navy uniform, based on that of the Royal Navy. The most noticeable difference from the pre-independence uniform is the change from a British royal crown to a Nigerian eagle at the top of the cap badge. Throughout the civil war the roles of the Nigerian Navy were to maintain a blockade against Biafran ports and to support any amphibious landings. (Private collection)

Biafran Navy

The Biafran Navy was a totally improvised force operating captured vessels, converted tugs and other small craft. Some Biafran boats were described as troop carriers, and were armed with ex-Nigerian 6-pounder guns. Vessels included the PC101, PC202 and PC203, which were civilian boats reinforced with armour plating and armed with machine guns. Some were wooden fishing boats powered with Volkswagen car engines, which had armoured infrastructure added with firing points for machine guns. These were useful patrol craft until they came up against the conventional ships of the Nigerian Navy. The Biafran vessels were manned by civilians largely recruited from the oil industry; these former Shell employees had skills in engineering, and some were former crewmen of oil ships. Small Chris-Craft speed boats were also confiscated from the Port Harcourt Sailing Club and were armed with a single machine gun mounted forward. Mainly operating in Delta Region and on the river system, the Biafran Navy could only really act as a distracting nuisance to the Federal Navy.

Nigerian Air Force

Formed only in April 1964, with aircrew training in West Germany, Canada, Ethiopia and India, this service began the war with no combat aircraft. In early 1967 it had only 5x C-47 transports, 20x West German Dornier Do 27 and 12x Italian Piaggio P149D trainers, and during that year it bought from the Austrian Air Force 8x Westland Whirlwind Mk 2 helicopters. Many of the 100 Nigerian pilots who had been trained under the aegis of a West German assistance group were Ibos, who left for the East in 1967.

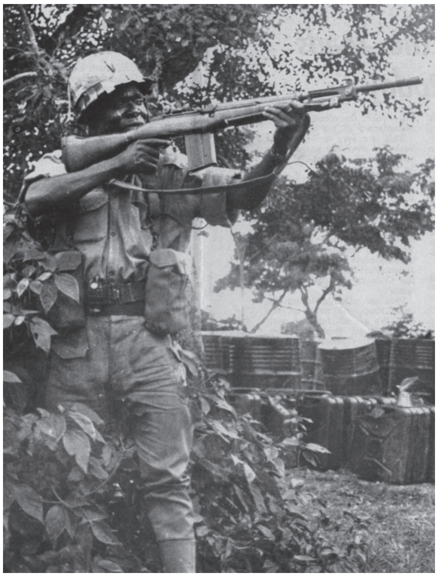
The Nigerians needed combat aircraft and pilots to fly them immediately, and when Britain and other Western nations refused to supply them with combat jets they looked to the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet Union and its client states in the Middle East proved willing both to sell aircraft and to supply pilots. The NAF's Soviet MiG and Ilyushin jets came from Algerian and Egyptian stocks, with pilots mainly provided by Egypt. Up to 20 British, South Africans and Australians were also employed privately to fly the Nigerian transport planes; when the Egyptian pilots proved unreliable, a number of these European aircrew were trained to fly the MiGs, and carried out attacks on both military and civilian targets.

By January 1970 the NAF had grown to about 33 aircraft with 3,000 ground and air personnel. It had 3x IL-28 light bombers and 12x MiG-17 ground-attack fighters, as well as 8x Czechoslovakian L-29 jet trainers. It still had ten of the Piaggio P149D armed trainers, and a mixed force of ten helicopters.

Biafran Air Force

The Biafran Air Force was created at the outset of the war, with a 'flying circus' of aircraft bought from various sources. One of the first purchases was a pair of ex-French Air Force Douglas 'B-26' (A-26 Invader) attack bombers, which arrived in Biafra in June 1967. Painted with 'sharkmouth' markings, they were flown on

Count Carl Gustav von Rosen, the elderly Swedish nobleman who reformed the Biafran Air Force in 1969, is seen in the cockpit of a Minicon 'light sporting aircraft'. Up to 18 Minicons were converted into light strike aircraft fitted with rocket-launchers, and made a series of successful raids between May and October 1969. (Private collection)



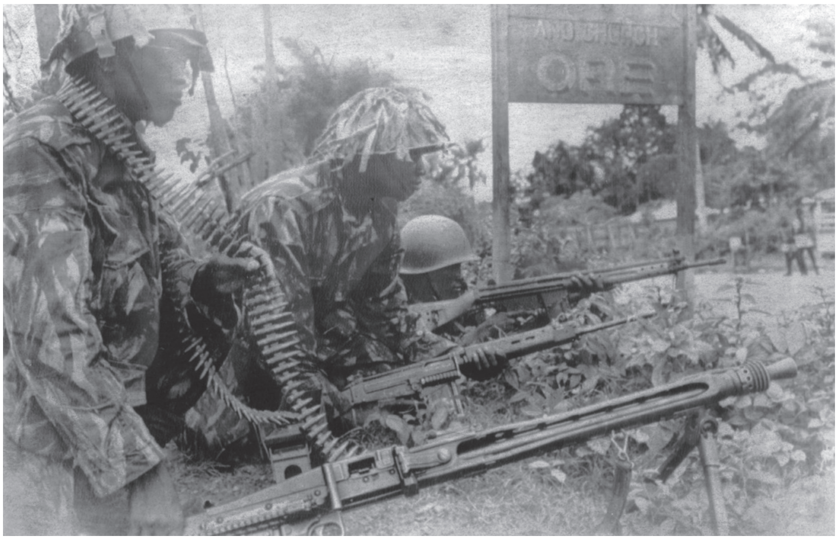
A Nigerian soldier guarding a fuel dump poses with his Italian-designed BM59 semi-automatic rifle, which had been adopted in the early 1960s but fell out of favour as the war progressed. He is wearing full uniform of khaki-drill shirt and trousers and an M1 steel helmet or liner garnished with cloth camouflage strips. His equipment is British 58-pattern webbing, and he has a British 'Mills bomb' fragmentation grenade hanging from his belt. (Private collection)

several missions in the early days of the war by foreign pilots, including a legendary Pole, Jan Zumbach, who had recently been active in the Congo. (The 52-year-old Zumbach was the epitome of a flying adventurer. A Polish Air Force pilot in September 1939, he had gone on to fly in first French and then RAF service throughout World War II. Flying Spitfires, he commanded No. 303 Sqn before rising to the rank of wing commander, racking up at least 12 confirmed kills and surviving several bail-outs.)

The Biafrans' desperate attempts to build a combat air arm continued with the purchase of two B-25 Mitchell bombers in October 1967. These elderly veterans flew a series of bombing missions in November before both were put out of action in December. In addition, half-a-dozen mixed Alouette II and III helicopters were acquired from France via a Luxembourg-based trading company, and several Biafran pilots were reportedly trained to fly them by a French instructor. Aircraft taken from civilian sources included an aged DC-3, and a modern Fokker Friendship transport which had been seized by the Eastern Region authorities in April 1967. However, most of these aircraft were either destroyed or became unserviceable due to maintenance problems during the early stages of the war.

For about a year the Biafrans did not have an effective air force, before the arrival of a 'supporter of lost causes', Count von Rosen. This 59-year-old Swedish pilot had flown for the Ethiopians in 1935–36 and for Finland in 1939. He now arrived in Biafra, bringing with him the first five tiny Swedish-made MFI-9B 'Minicon' trainers. Each fitted with French launchers for 12x 76mm rockets, the Minicons were flown by a total of five Swedish volunteers and two Biafrans in a number of raids against Nigerian targets between 22 May and October 1969. Flying just above tree-top level, the Minicons raided oil installations and Nigerian Air Force bases, destroying several Soviet-supplied jets on the ground. Although such small-scale raids were never going to turn the tide of the war, they had a great propaganda effect for the Biafrans and were an irritant to the Nigerians.

This Federal machine-gun team on the edge of the town of Obe are armed with an MG3 light machine gun and FN FAL and Heckler & Koch G3 semi-automatic rifles. Such mixing of weapon types was almost as common as it was in the Biafran Army, but the fact that nearly all Nigerian infantry weapons took the same 7.62mm NATO ammunition made the life of ordnance supply officers relatively easier in the Federal Army. The soldier in the foreground is wearing a helmet liner while his two comrades have steel helmets. (Private collection)



The Federal crew of an Italian OTO Melara Spa 105mm pack howitzer fire in support of an advancing Saracen armoured personnel carrier. Nigerian advances against Biafran towns were often preceded by artillery bombardments, sometimes over several days. Colonel Adekunle, the commander of 3rd Marine Div, liked to mass all his artillery and mortars, combined with the 76mm guns of Saladin armoured cars, to give maximum firepower. (Private collection)

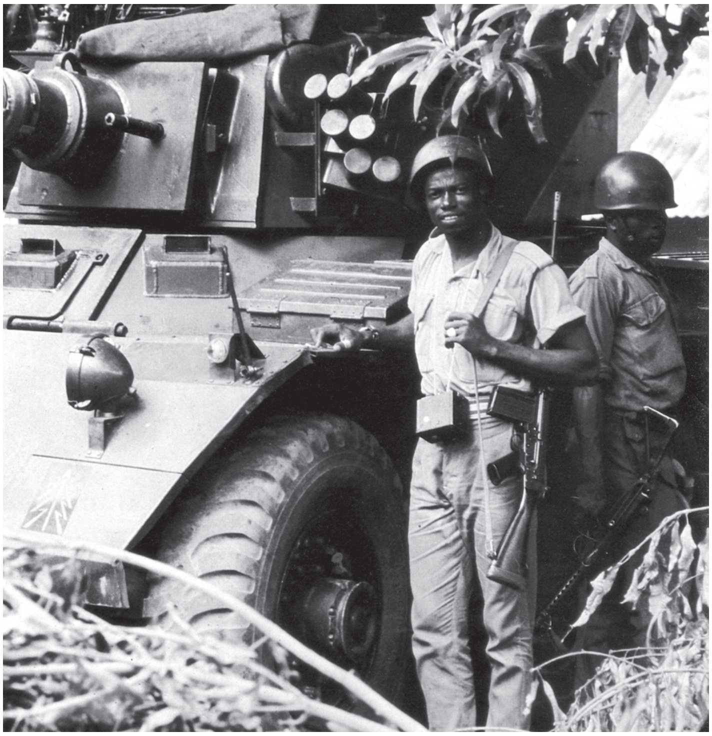
By the end of 1969 the Biafran Air Force had a total of 18 Minicons and six longer-range AT-6 Harvard trainers which had been converted for ground attack. Biafra made numerous attempts to acquire jet fighter-bombers including Fouga Magisters, F-86 Sabres and Gloster Meteors. Two unserviceable Magisters spent most of the war sitting in a hangar at São Tomé in the Cape Verde Islands; several Meteors were purchased, but none ever arrived in Biafra, and they were left rotting on foreign airfields (including one in Guinea-Bissau) at the end of the war.

WEAPONS & EQUIPMENT

NIGERIAN FEDERAL ARMY

In the first year of independence the Federal Army purchased from Britain 7.62mm FN FAL (SLR) semi-automatic rifles and 9mm Sterling sub-machine guns to replace its .303in Lee–Enfield No. 4s in front-line

Nigerian crews check over Daimler Ferret Mk 4 scout cars of one of the reconnaissance squadrons in the last weeks before the outbreak of the civil war. Armed only with a .30 cal Browning machine gun and with a maximum armour thickness of 16mm, the Ferret was intended purely for reconnaissance work, but during the civil war, facing little armoured or artillery opposition from the Biafrans, the three squadrons could be employed in an infantry support role. (Private collection)



Nigerian troops, wearing the usual mix of khaki-drill and jungle-green uniforms, with a British-supplied Alvis Saladin six-wheeled armoured car. The Saladin was the heaviest vehicle in service with the Federal Army, and its 76mm gun was greatly feared by the Biafrans; Saladins of the Recce Squadrons usually formed the spearhead of Nigerian attacks. The armoured cars were delivered painted in British dark 'bronze-green'; the insignia partly visible below the spotlight is a yellow-on-green version of the British wartime Reconnaissance Regt cap badge. (Private collection)

service. These were joined from 1963 by 7.62mm Italian-designed BM59 semi-automatic rifles, produced in small numbers under licence at a factory in the Northern Region city of Kaduna. The Lee–Enfield remained in widespread use in the early months of the war until enough modern rifles could be imported. During the war the two main rifles used were the Belgian/British FN FAL and the 7.62mm West German Heckler & Koch G3. The Soviet Union also supplied the Nigerians with a total of 20,000 AK47 and AKM assault rifles. These arrived with 750,000 rounds of ammunition, but a year-long delay in sending an additional 2 million rounds meant that some never reached front-line units.

The Nigerians used three main types of light machine guns: the old .303in Bren gun, the superior 7.62mm FN GPMG (general-purpose machine gun), and the West German MG3, a development of the wartime MG42. The MG3 had been adopted as the Federal Army's standard LMG just before the outbreak of the war.

In 1965 the Nigerians had adopted the Swedish Carl Gustav 84mm shoulder-fired anti-tank rocket-launcher, but the few that were delivered before the civil war were rarely used. The Federal Army did use a number of other types including the Belgian Blindicide RL83, the West German Panzerfaust 44 and the Bulgarian ATGL-L, the latter a copy of the Soviet RPG-7. There are also photographs showing the US M20 3.5in 'super-bazooka' in use. Mortars included the British World War II-vintage 3in, and some more modern 81mm Tampella mortars from Israel. Several types of 'recoilless rifles' were employed, including Land Rover-mounted British 120mm Mobats early in the war. These were later supplemented by small numbers of the Soviet 107mm B-11.

Artillery & armour

The Federal Army started the conflict with a few old British 25-pdr gun-howitzers and 6-pdr anti-tank guns, but for most of the war their main artillery piece was the Italian 105mm Model 56 'pack' howitzer. The arrival in 1969 of four batteries of Soviet 122mm M1955 field guns would have been one of the deciding factors in Biafra's defeat, since they easily had the range to threaten Biafra's remaining major airport at Uli, but in fact they were not employed before the war ended. Nigerian anti-aircraft guns were mostly Bofors 40mm, of which 12 arrived in August 1967 to reinforce those already in service. The Federal Army also used 20mm Oerlikons, some of which fell into Biafran hands during the war.

Up to 1964 the Nigerians had purchased only 12 British Ferret light scout cars and two Saladin heavy armoured cars. After the war began further Saladins were bought, along with Saracen armoured personnel

A heavily camouflaged Land Rover of the Federal Army, looking out for any Biafran stragglers in the closing stages of the war. Attacks on the Nigerians' long supply lines were effective, but were not carried out on a large enough scale to significantly damage their war effort. If the heavily outgunned Biafrans had avoided conventional engagements from the outset and had concentrated on guerrilla warfare they might have inflicted far heavier losses on the Federal forces. (Private collection

carriers. The Federal Army also acquired a number of French Panhard AML-60 and AML-90 armoured cars, the former armed with a 60mm mortar and the latter with a 90mm gun. While these AFVs were effective, their actual contribution was exaggerated; mechanical maintenance was poor, keeping many of them off the road for long periods. The Biafrans soon lost their fear of the Nigerian wheeled armoured cars; although these were employed to lead attacks they were largely confined to roads and tracks, where they could be stopped by barricades, tank traps and other obstacles.

Transport

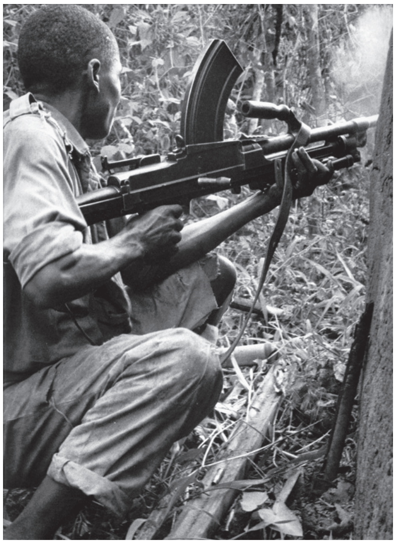
The two mainstays of the Nigerian Army's transport fleet in 1967 were the Bedford RL 3- to 4-ton truck and the Land Rover. Most battalions had one command car, one ambulance, two motorcycles, and up to 48x 3-tonners and 35 Land Rovers. During the war the expansion of the Federal Army was matched with imports of more trucks, mainly from the UK. In 1968 the Soviet Union sold the Nigerians 80 jeeps and command cars, probably of the GAZ and UAZ-69 types. The vast distances over which the Federal Army had to supply its units meant that a large number of trucks and other vehicles were needed to sustain it on campaign.

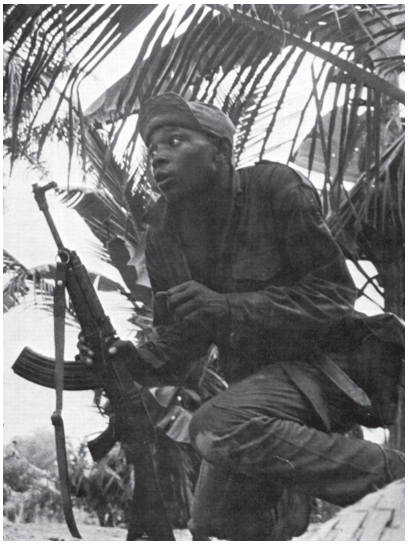
BIAFRAN ARMY

At the start of the war the newly formed Biafran Army had, according to several sources, only about 120 Lee–Enfield No. 4 rifles, and certainly no more than 150, with perhaps 12 Bren light machine guns. All the other weapons held in the Eastern Region before 1967 had been removed by the Federal Army during the build-up to war. Colonel Ojukwu boasted about the amounts of weaponry available to defend his new nation, but this was pure bravado.

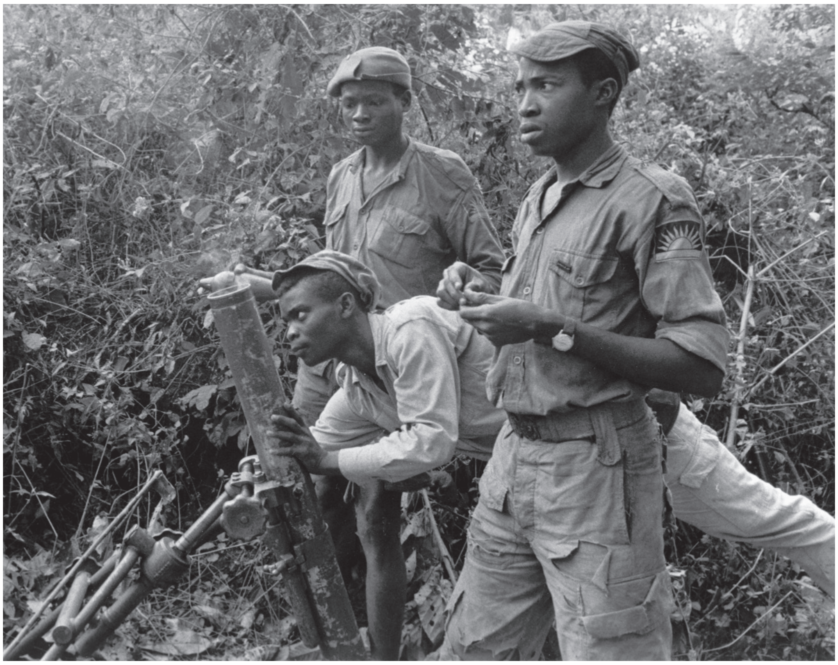
LEFT **Armed with a .303in Bren light machine gun, a Biafran soldier lies in wait for Nigerian patrols. Biafra only managed to retain a few of these LMGs when armouries in the East were emptied by the Federal Army in May 1967 on the eve of the civil war, but the Nigerians used them in large numbers during the early months of fighting – they were a familiar and trusted weapon for the veterans posted to the 1st Division. (Romano Cagnoni)**

RIGHT **A young Biafran soldier looks anxiously in the direction of the enemy before advancing along a road. Much of the fighting took place along the road network of Biafra, since neither army was keen to get tied down in a classic jungle campaign. This soldier is armed with the Czech 7.62mm VZ-58 assault rifle, the best infantry weapon that the Biafrans imported, though in very modest numbers. He has some webbing equipment, including a haversack which was probably taken from a fallen Nigerian soldier. (Romano Cagnoni)**





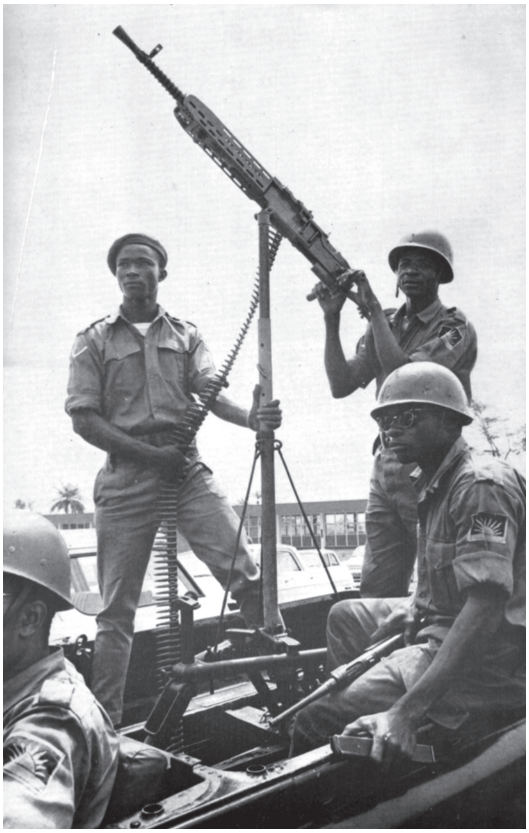
However, he had been trying to procure arms for his projected secession since 1966, and between January and April 1967 some did arrive in Biafran ports. These were almost certainly all of Czechoslovakian make: 150 pistols, 820x VZ-52 semi-automatic rifles, 723x VZ-58 assault rifles, and 300 sub-machine guns, the latter being a mixture of modern 9mm CZ-23s and CZ-25s and a few older CZ-247s. In addition 1,860 bolt-action rifles were listed, almost certainly Czech 7.92mm VZ-24 copies of the German Mauser 98k. Machine guns which arrived totalled 20x VZ-37 heavy and 55 light models, the latter including ZB-26s and ZB-30s dating from before World War II and a few VZ-52s and VZ-59s (see below). Although all of these arms were Czech-made, the Czechoslovakian government has always maintained that they were sold to Biafra by a third



The Biafran crew of a 3in or 81mm mortar prepare their piece; the sight has not yet been fitted. Most mortars in Biafran service were of this calibre or smaller, and came from a wide variety of sources. Ammunition was stockpiled carefully in advance of any planned offensive, but the available mortar bombs were usually quickly expended. (Romano Cagnoni)

party. This job lot of arms was probably the best acquisition that the Biafrans managed throughout the war. Other deals fell through, or ended with unsuitable, damaged or incomplete arms being supplied by dubious dealers at exorbitant prices.

One delivery of UK arms that was reported to have slipped through the net in the early days of the war was one for 930 FN FAL rifles, supposedly sold to Biafra by the British firm of Parker & Hale after conversion to British and Commonwealth SLR standard, i.e. to fire semi-automatic only (the original Belgian design had a fully automatic selective-fire option). During the war the vast majority of rifles that arrived in Biafra were more World War II-vintage Mauser bolt-action models. These had been phased out by European armies and were available from arms dealers in quantity at low prices, together with plentiful 7.92mm ammunition; another consideration was that a bolt-action rifle discouraged the waste of ammunition to which semi-trained armies are so prone. After 1968 the French 7.5mm MAS-36 bolt-action rifle was also acquired from the friendly former French colonies of Gabon and Ivory Coast, which had been promised that France would replenish their arsenals with equivalent or more modern weapons. Late in the war the government of Haiti gave Biafra 300 more MAS-36s as a gift.



These Biafran troops in summer 1968 man a 7.92mm Czech VZ-37 heavy machine gun mounted in the back of a Land Rover for anti-aircraft use, fed by a 200-round metal link belt. (This pre-World War II weapon had been the forerunner of the British-made Besa tank machine gun.) The crew wear new uniforms, three of them with rising-sun shoulder patches, while the man in the beret has a lance-corporal's yellow chevron high on his right sleeve; the others wear liners from M1 or similar NATO helmets. The soldier in the right foreground is armed with a Czech 9mm CZ-247 sub-machine gun, one of the more obscure types in Biafran service. (Private collection)

Throughout the Civil War it was claimed that arms were being secretly supplied to Biafra by sympathetic but officially neutral sources. Israel may have sent a small quantity of captured Egyptian small arms after the 1967 Six-Day War, but there is little evidence for this. Chinese small arms were also reported to have been seen in use by the Biafrans; any that did arrive probably came from Tanzanian stores, or across Zambian territory. South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal are also mentioned as possible suppliers of weapons to Biafra.

The Biafrans had a number of models of machine gun in service during the war, including captured Nigerian types. Their imported models were the Czech 7.92mm ZB-26 and ZB-30 light machine guns, the VZ-37 heavy belt-fed gun of the same calibre, and 7.62mm VZ-52 LMGs and VZ-59 GPMGs. German World War II 7.92mm MG34 light machine guns were also used in some numbers (again, possibly from Czech sources), as were the handful of .303in Brens.

Hand-held rocket-launchers to counter Nigerian AFVs were in short supply, and were initially confined to a few Czech Pancerovka P-27s (similar to the Soviet RPG-7). It was reported that Biafra later acquired a few Chinese-made RPG-2s, and from 1968 small numbers of French 68mm SARPACs.

Mortars, also in short supply, came from a wide variety of sources. The main types in service were the elderly British 2in and 3in models, but others included at least a couple of heavy French 120mm tubes, and some Spanish 81mm L-Ns (of which six were reportedly used in one battle near Onitsha). The rapid expenditure of mortar bombs was always a limiting factor.

In this genuine action photograph from the battle for Owerri in April 1969, a wide-eyed Biafran soldier is momentarily taken unawares by the war photographer Romano Cagnoni. The Biafran is armed with one of his army's few anti-tank weapons, a Czech Pancerovka P-27. While this was capable of destroying any armoured vehicles used by the Nigerians, most Federal Army armoured cars that the Biafrans did manage to knock out were disabled by such means as roadside 'elephant traps'. (Romano Cagnoni)

Artillery & armour

The handful of artillery pieces included captured Federal Army 105mm howitzers and a few old 6-pdr anti-tank guns. A handful of World War II-era 105mm guns of Czech origin were in service with the 4th Cdo Bde; these appear to have been M18/49s, a Czechoslovakian upgrade of the German leFH 18/40 with solid rubber tyres fitted. It was even reported that the Biafrans bought some World War I '75s', but that these turned out to be missing their breech blocks. Apart from a couple of captured 40mm Bofors guns, dedicated anti-aircraft weapons were confined to a few Swiss 20mm Oerlikons, reportedly supplied via the Spanish firm of Hispano-Suiza under the guise of 'production rejects'.

During the war the Biafrans captured a fair amount of heavy military equipment and weaponry from the Nigerians. This war booty included two Bofors guns, several Italian 105mm howitzers and a handful of armoured vehicles. The latter were given names by the Biafrans: a Saladin was named 'Corporal Nwafor' after the militiaman who died during its capture. A Panhard AML-60 was named 'Oguta Boy' after the town in which it was captured, and a Ferret scout car was likewise christened 'Uzuakoli Boy'. The only Saracen APC captured by the Biafrans was named 'Ndidi', which in the Ibo language means 'Patience'. Occasionally the Biafrans were able to form two-vehicle elements with captured armoured cars; for instance, a Saladin and an AML-90 were seen in action together on the Okigwi front. Other armoured vehicles were home-made, basically trucks with plating added; the armour added too much weight, causing them to break down often as their engines overheated. One of these improvised armoured cars, named 'Genocide', was a monster which caused panic amongst the Nigerian ranks until it broke down; it had to stop at least every 30 minutes to allow the engine to cool, which was inconvenient in the middle of a battle.

A handful of Universal tracked carriers of World War II vintage were purchased, probably from a French dealer, and had extra bodywork added. These so-called 'Red Devils' were much vaunted by the Biafrans, but they also broke down in action under the strain of the added armour. Other attempted purchases of war-surplus armoured vehicles included a British Daimler Mk II Dingo scout car bought from a Canadian dealer, which broke down on its way to the docks and never arrived in Nigeria. Another ambitious deal for a reported but clearly exaggerated 300 examples of the Swiss T-16 version of the Bren gun carrier failed to materialize. Home-made armoured personnel carriers included a 'Type C', basically a turtle-shaped armoured box on wheels, and another version shaped like a locomotive boiler with windows.

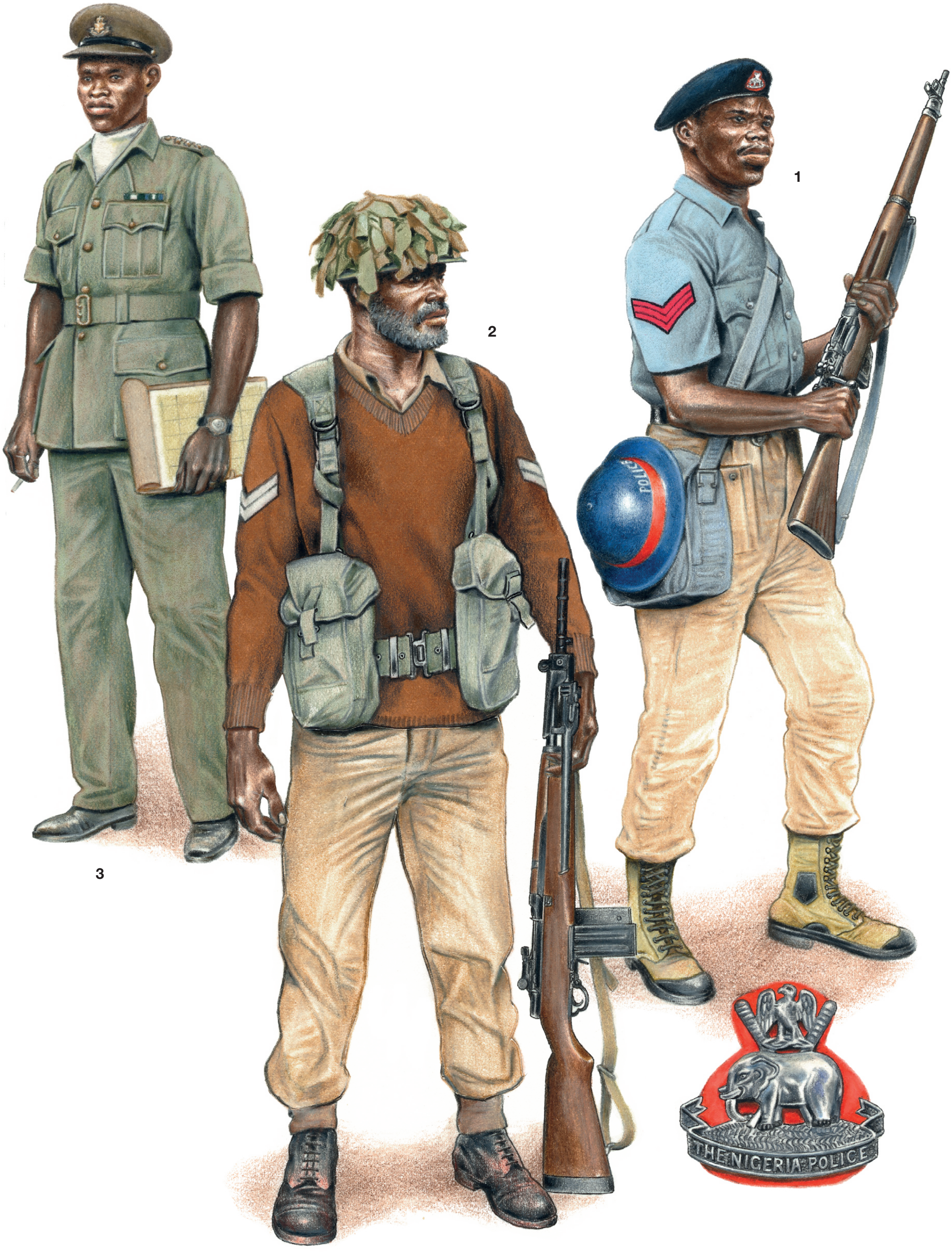
Improvised weapons

The lack of conventional weaponry from the start of the war led to the establishment of the Biafran Research and Production (RAP) Department, a group of local scientists and engineers who helped to develop a series of home-made weapons. They built land mines, grenades, Molotov cocktails, and various types of booby-traps like those

(Continued on page 33)

NIGERIAN FORCES, 1967

1: Sgt, Police Mobile Force, Mid-West
2: Cpl, Federal Army 1st Div, Nsukka
3: Capt, Federal Army 11th Bn, Mid-West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POLICE
THE NIGERIA POLICE

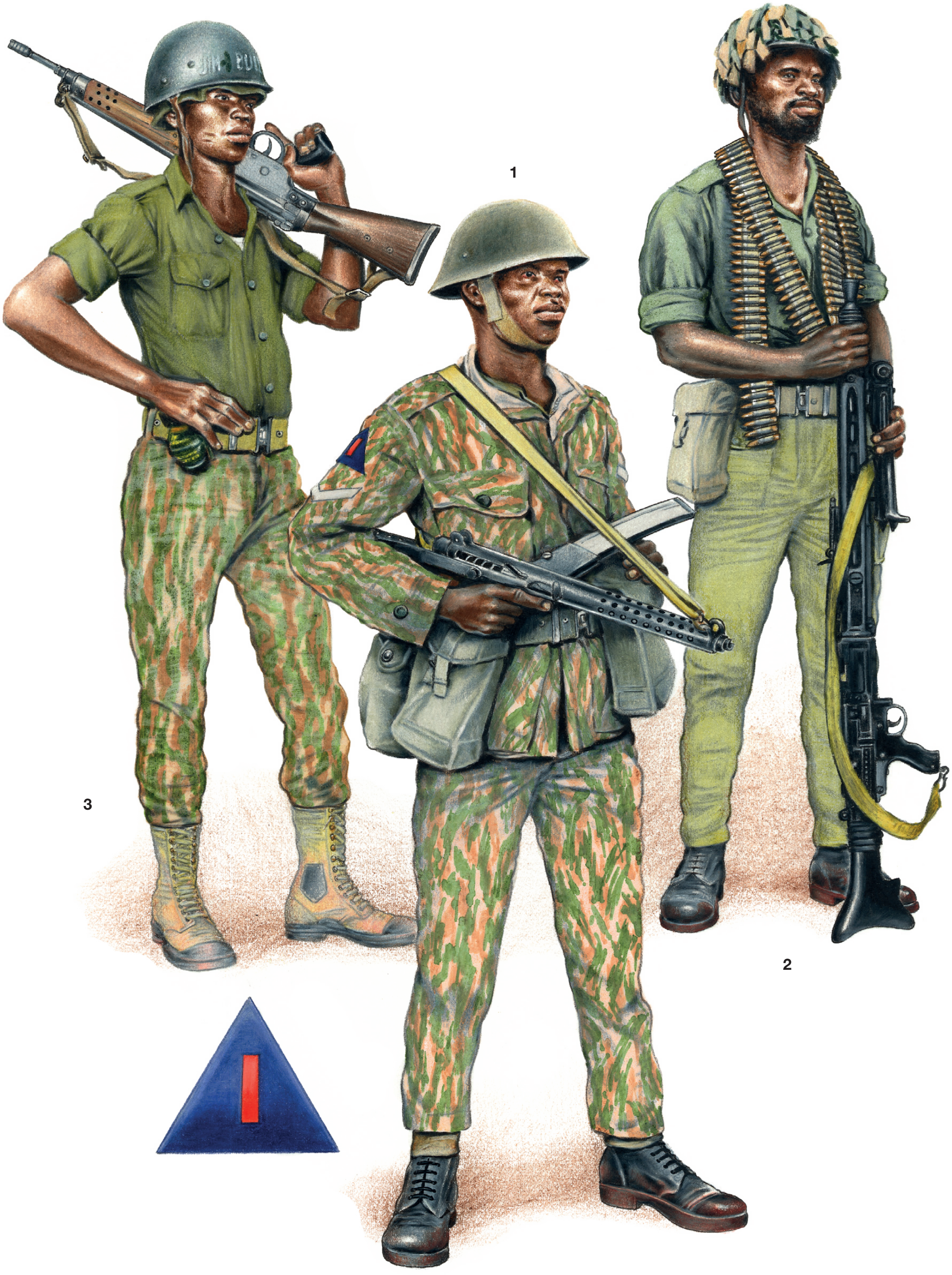
A

FEDERAL ARMY, 1968

1: Lance-Corporal, 1st Division

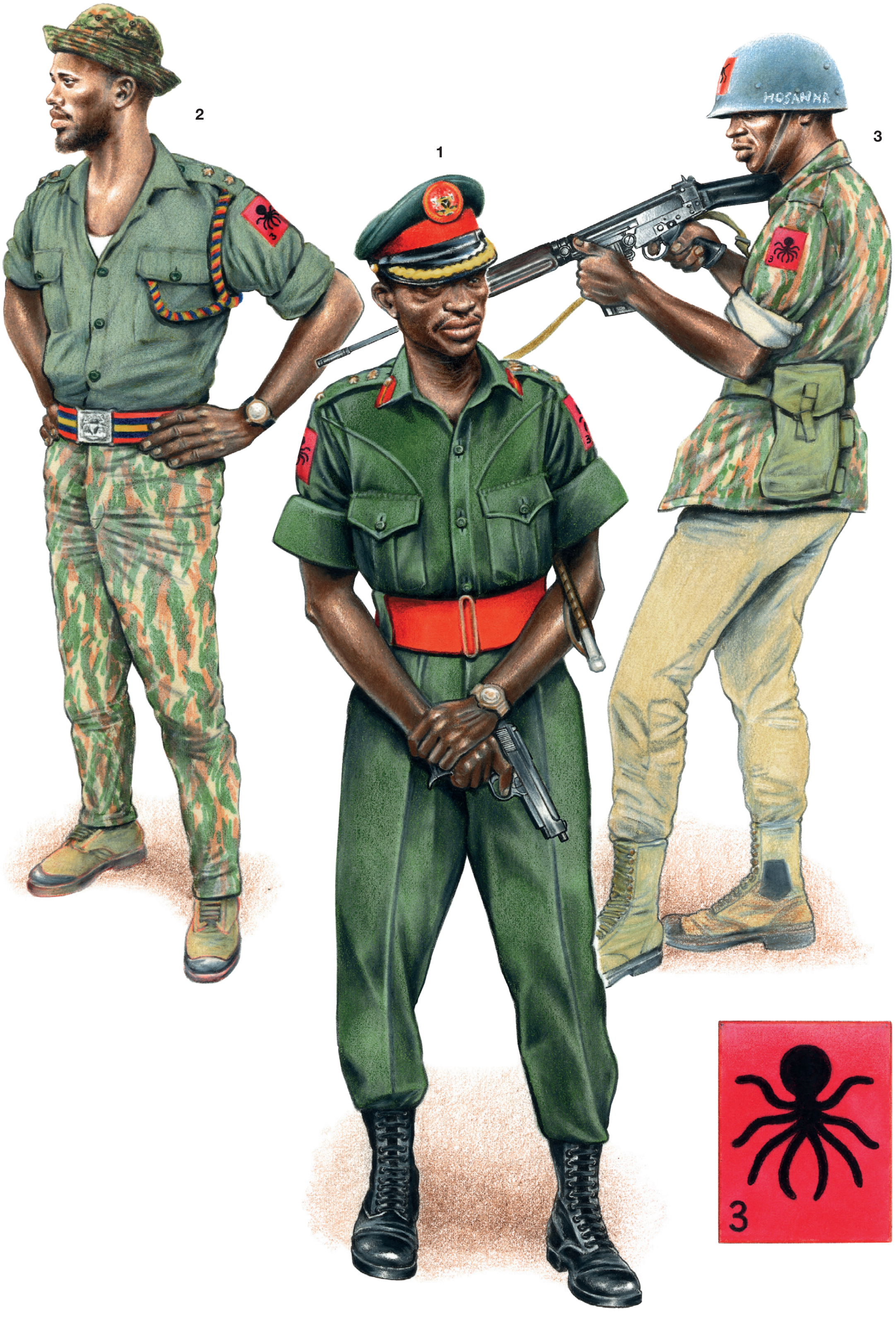
2: Machine-gunner, 2nd Division

3: Private, 2nd Division

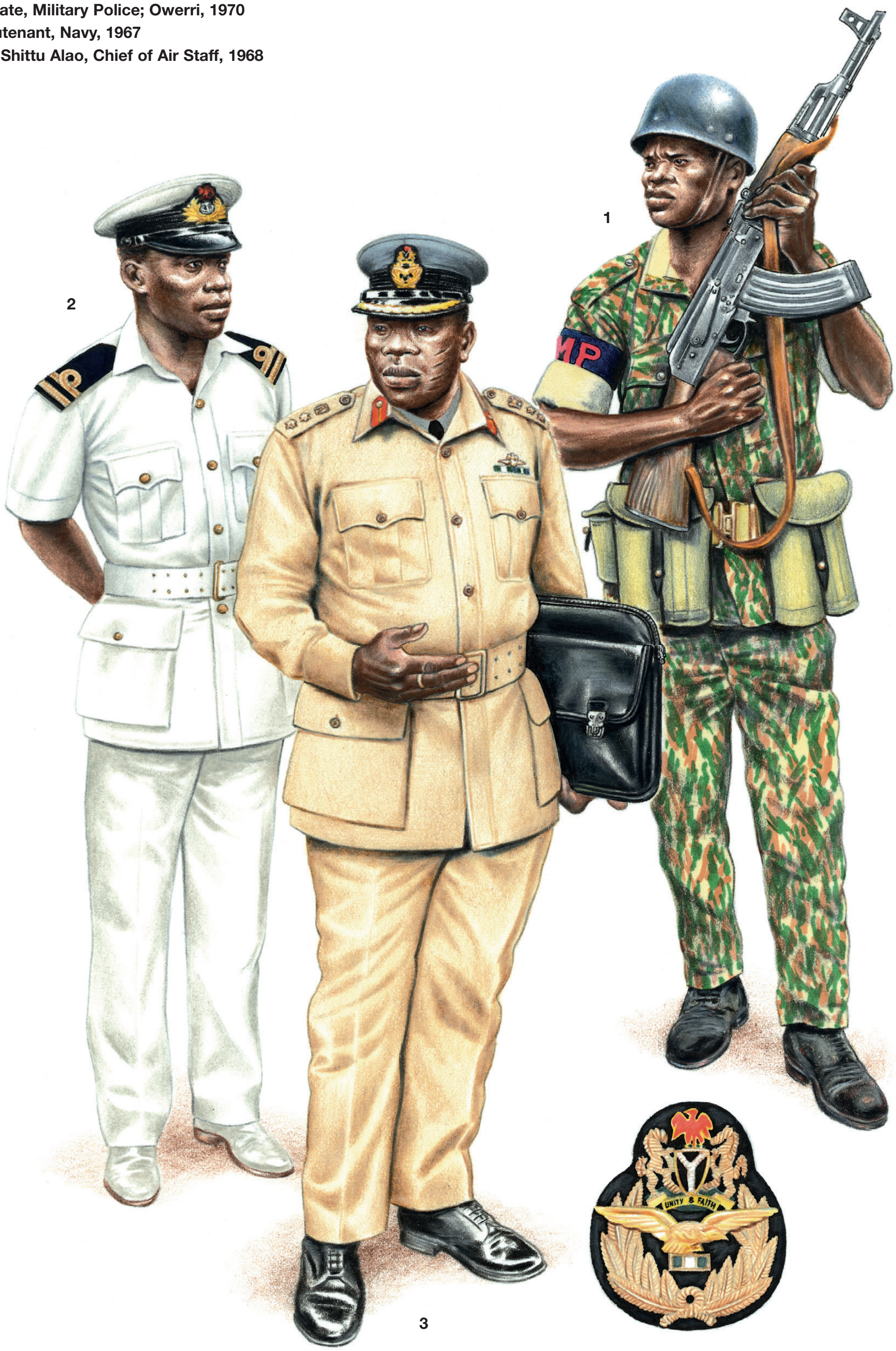


B

FEDERAL ARMY 3rd MARINE DIVISION
1: Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, 1968
2: Artillery lieutenant, 1968
3: Infantry private, 1969–70



NIGERIAN ARMY, NAVY & AIR FORCE, 1967–70
1: Private, Military Police; Owerri, 1970
2: Lieutenant, Navy, 1967
3: Col Shittu Alao, Chief of Air Staff, 1968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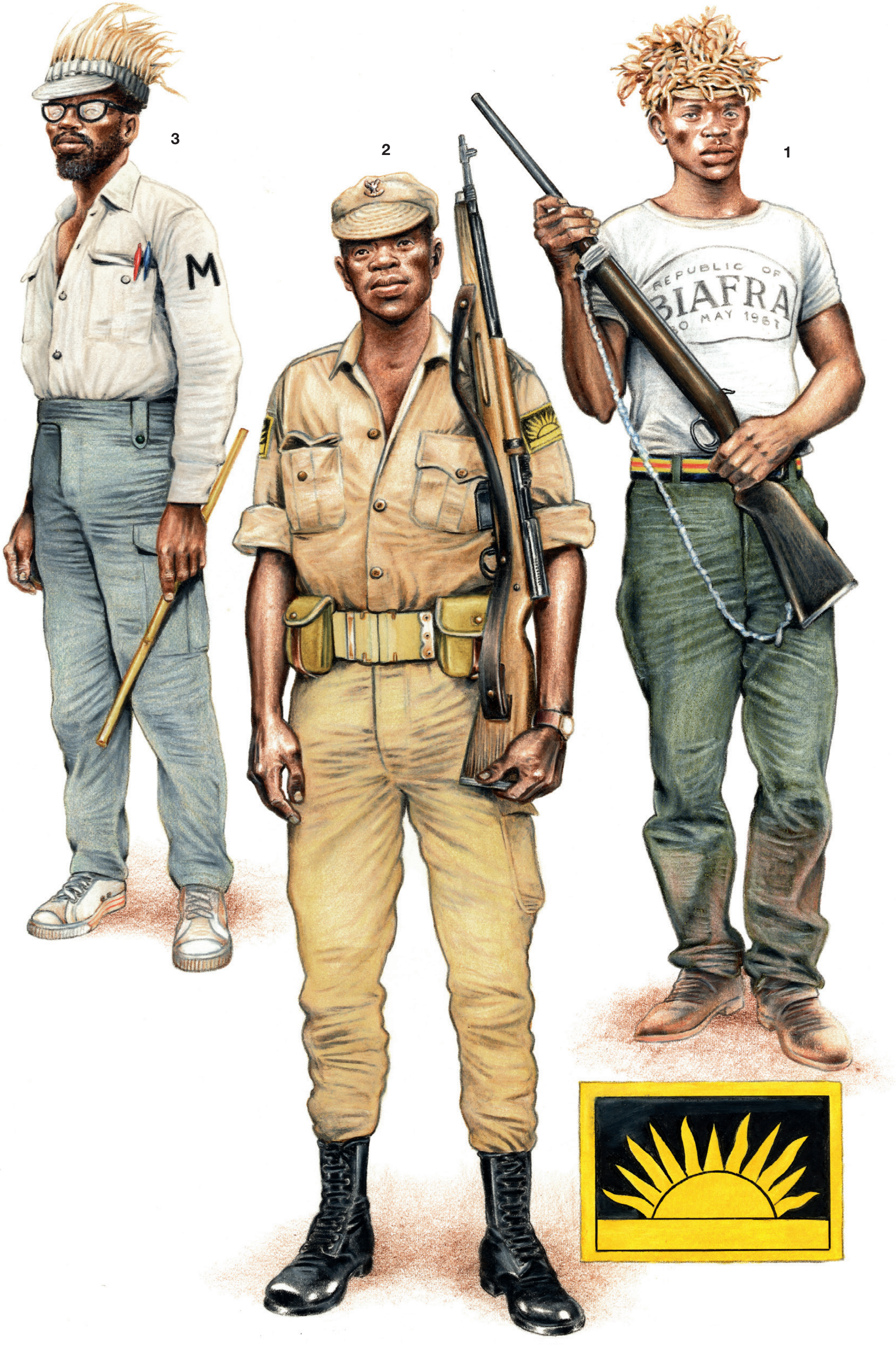
BIAFRAN FORCES, 1967

1: Militiaman, Enugu
2: Private, Biafran Army
3: Militia officer, Enugu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BIAFRA
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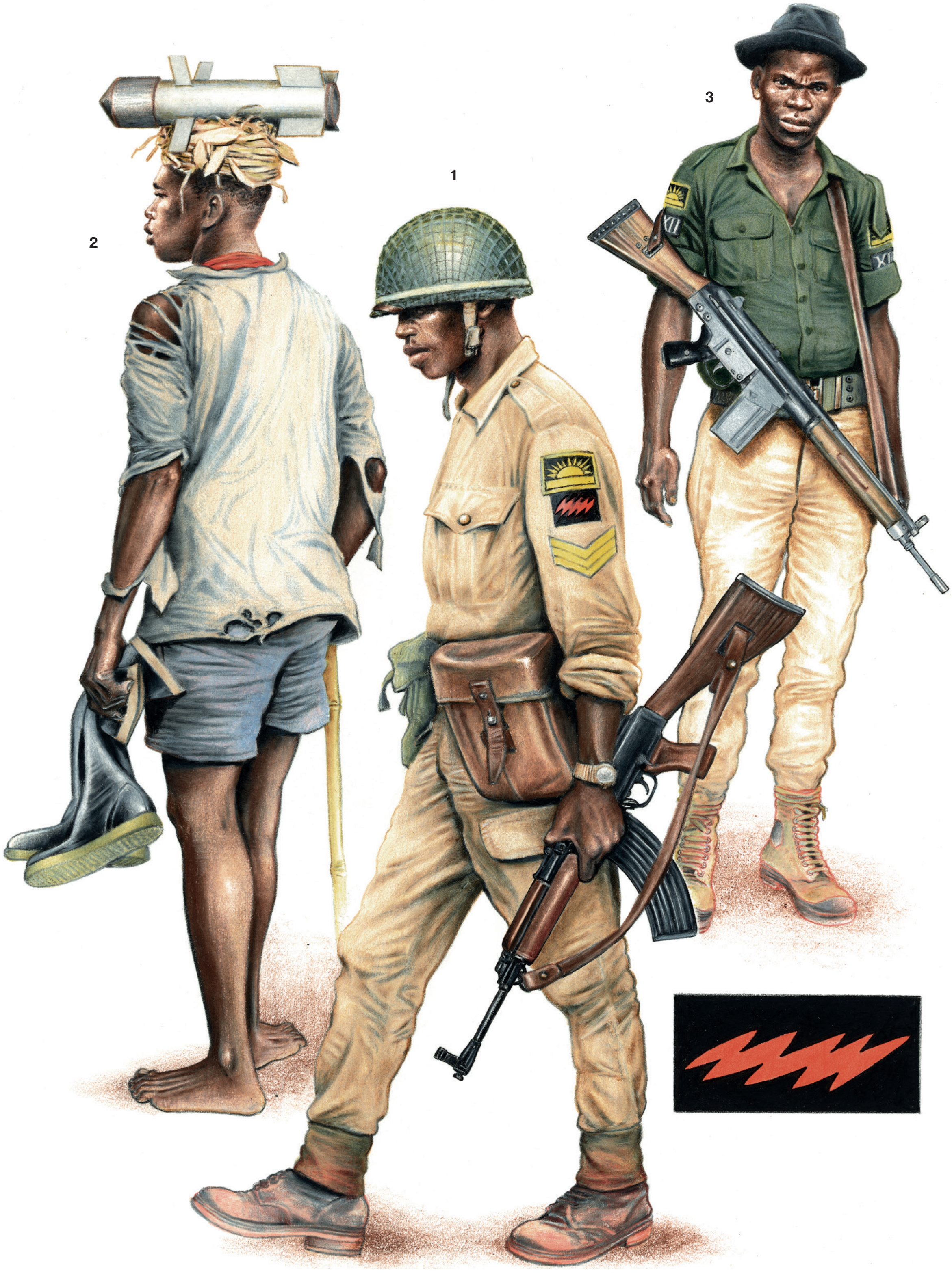
BIAFRAN ARMY, 1968–69

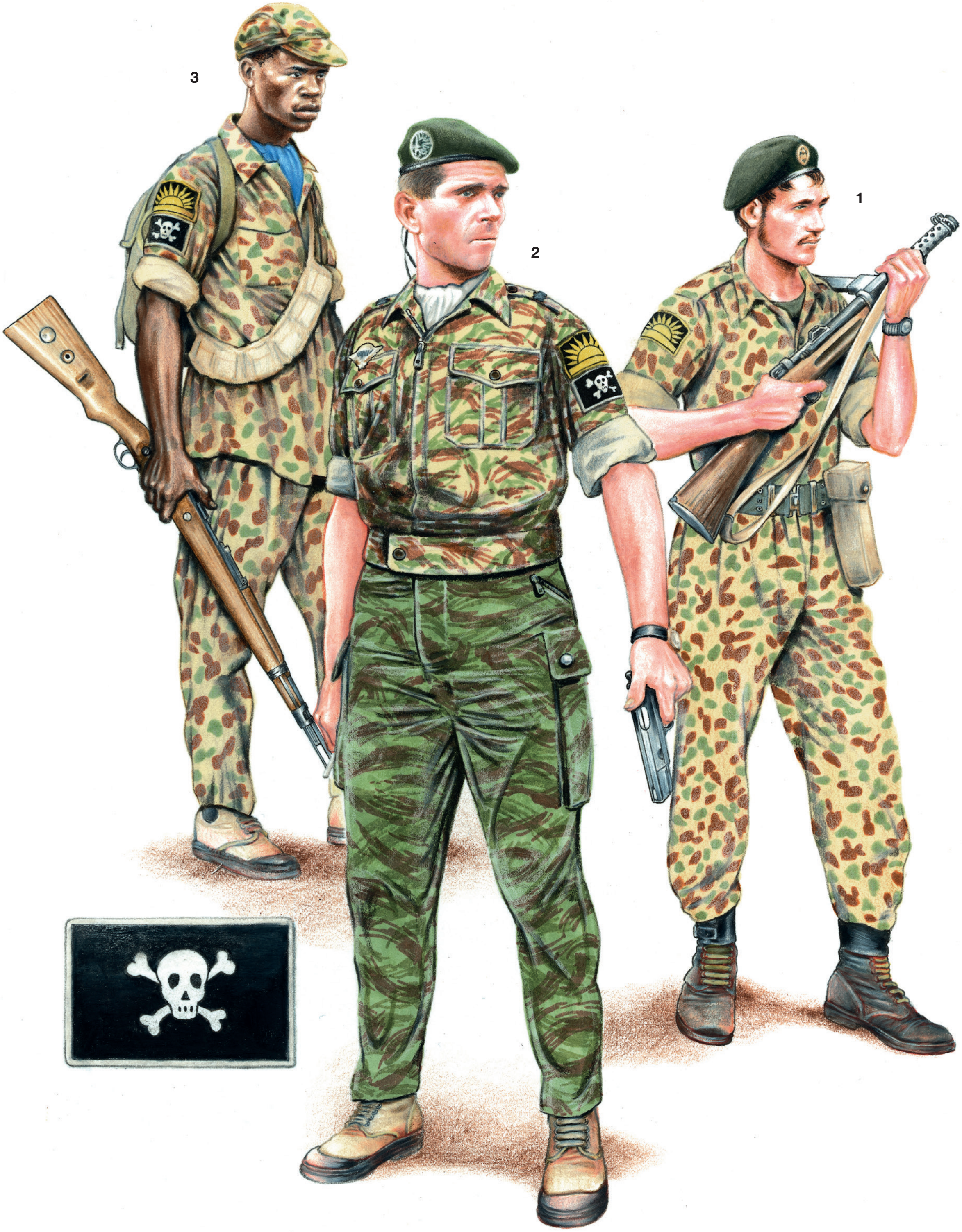
1: Sergeant, 'S' Division, 1969

2: Rocket crewman, Ahoada Strike Force, 1968

3: Private, 12th Division, 1969



MERCENARY-LED BIAFRAN UNITS, 1967–68
1: Mercenary, Calabar, October 1967
2: Maj Rolf Steiner, 4th Cdo Bde, summer 1968
3: Commando, ‘Guards’, 4th Cdo Div, November 1968



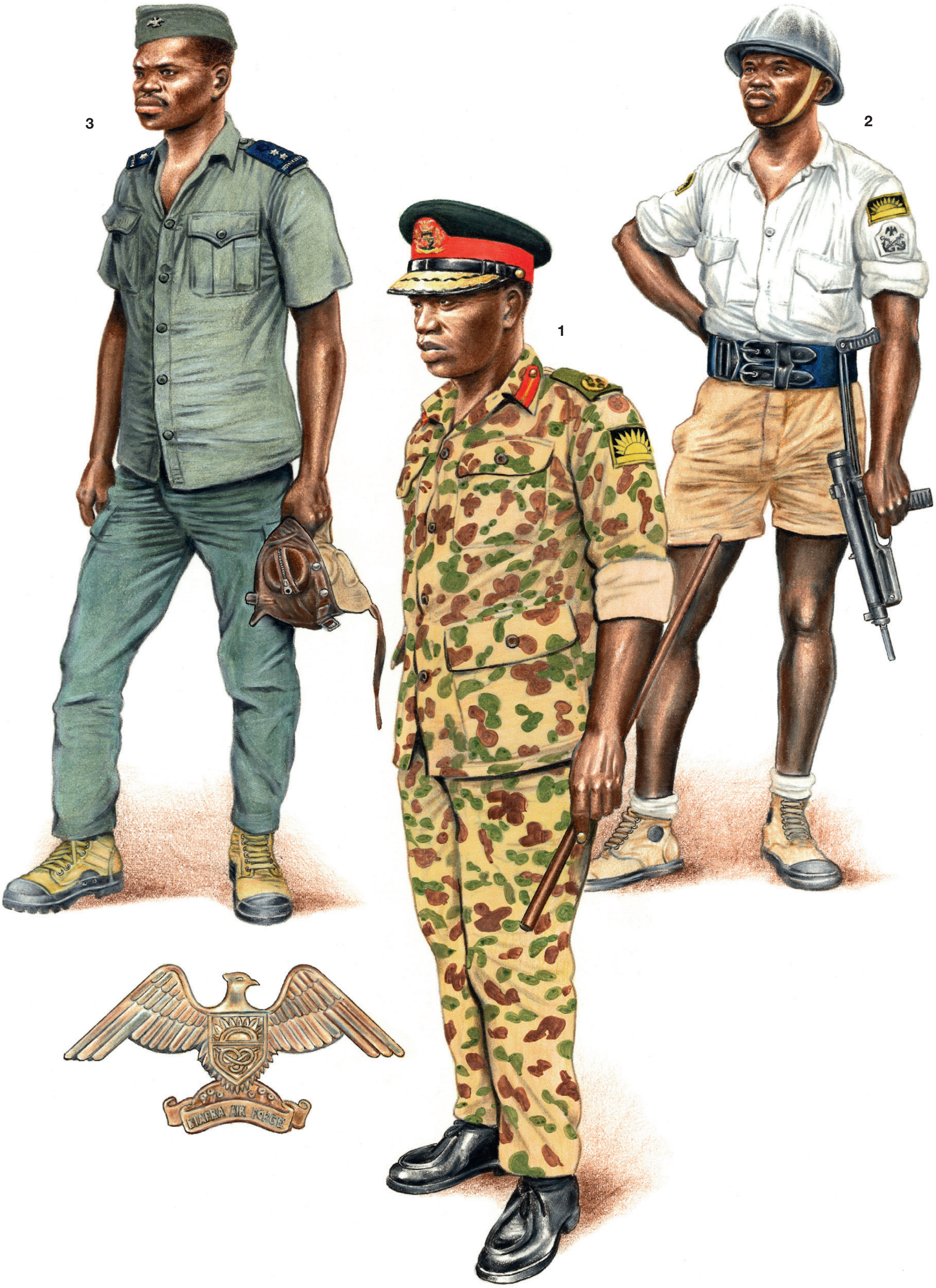
G

BIAFRAN ARMY, NAVY & AIR FORCE, 1968–70

1: Gen Philip Effiong, Chief of General Staff, January 1970

2: Petty Officer, Biafran Navy, 1968

3: Lieutenant, Biafran Air Force, 1969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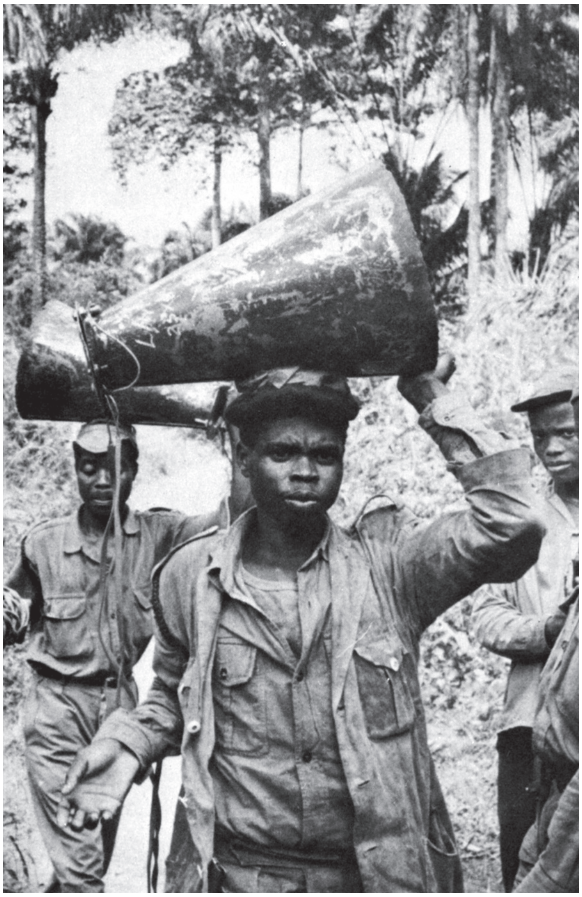
BIAFRA AIR FORCE

H

used by the contemporary Viet Cong. Their most successful weapon was the dreaded ‘Ogbunigwe’, which was basically a sealed bucket full of scrap metal with an explosive charge at its base; when set up against a tree and fired it acted like a giant shotgun, sending shards of metal in a cone towards the advancing enemy. The basic design came in a variety of patterns, e.g. the ‘Ojukwu Kettle’, ‘Ojukwu Drums’, and ‘Flying Ogbunigwe’. The flying version was propelled by a charge into the air towards the enemy to project its contents from above; if on target this could be devastating, but there was no real way to accurately set the range.

Electronically fired ground-to-ground and ground-to-air rockets were also developed, but these had a nasty habit of ‘boomeranging’ back towards the firers. The first six trial models exploded when test-fired, killing or injuring their crews. After development through a process of trial and error these 3ft-long rockets, with a calibre of 6ins, grew more successful, though not really any more accurate. These and other weapons produced by the RAP went some way towards maintaining the Biafran war effort, but in the long run home-made weapons were never going to be a substitute for conventional weaponry.

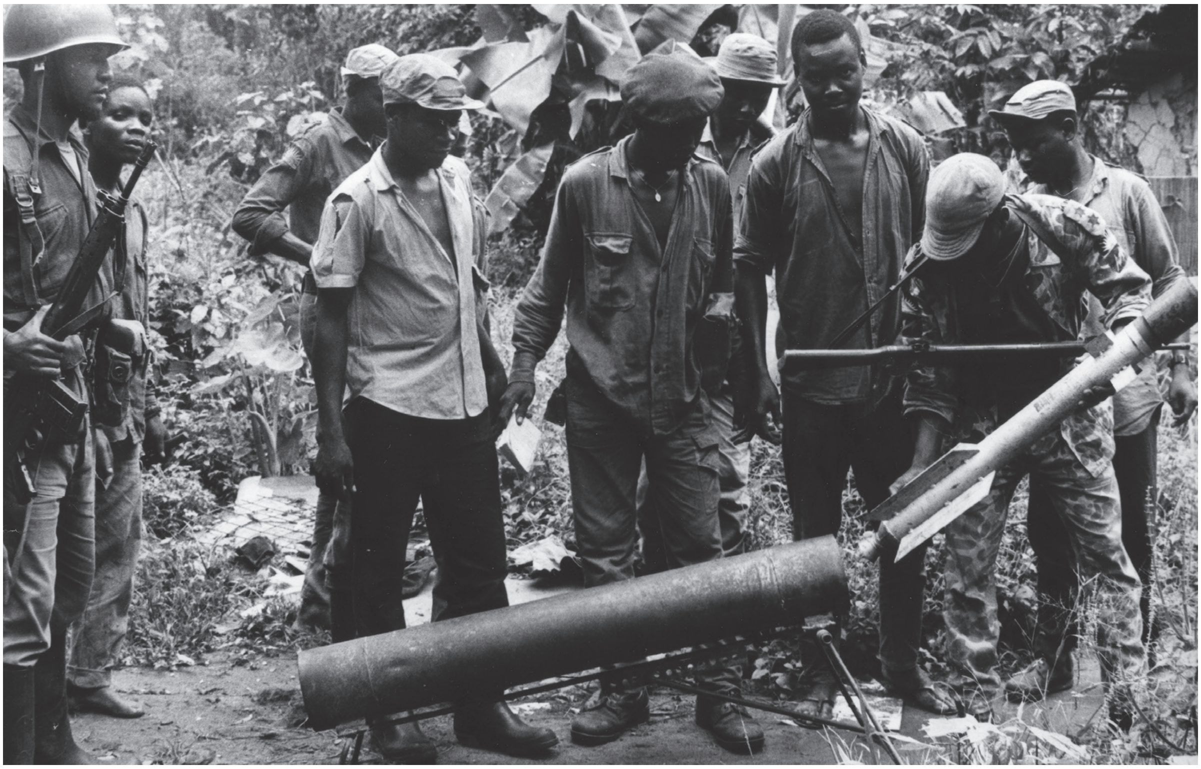


Biafran troops move towards the front line carrying ‘Ojukwu Kettles’ on their heads. This primitive but effective weapon was basically a sealed bucket full of scrap – iron nuts and bolts, broken glass, etc. – placed on top of a bursting charge. If set up against a tree trunk and ignited this might have a similar effect on enemy infantry as a Claymore mine, but it was a great deal less predictable. (Private collection)

Ammunition shortages

Throughout the war the Biafran Army suffered from a crippling shortage of all kinds of ammunition. In most actions Biafran soldiers were rationed to a few rounds each; at times a man might be issued with a single cartridge for a defensive action, or two for an offensive operation. When a Biafran operation was launched that unit’s officers would rush around neighbouring units trying to borrow ammunition. Many attacks had to be curtailed simply because the Biafrans ran out of ammunition before they could exploit success. In contrast, the Federal Army could usually fire off as many rounds as it liked, and liberally sprayed the cover on all sides as it advanced. It was the same when it came to shells: one Biafran artillery officer described how he fired two precious shells towards a Federal gun position, only to receive about 90 in return.

This chronic disparity in ammunition available to the two armies is illustrated by a statistic from November 1968: that month the Federal Army expended 120 tons of ammunition, while the Biafran Army used 5 tons. The shortage of ammunition on the Biafran side often led to risks being taken to fill the gaps. For instance, a delivery of 60mm mortar bombs were found to consist of smoke rounds only. In an effort to convert them to HE the scientists of the RAP tried to replace the smoke-generating chemicals with explosive, but on at least four occasions these blew up in the mortar tubes and killed their crews.



Interested onlookers gather round as one of the crew prepares to load a home-made rocket into the launching tube. Although the shrapnel-filled 6-in rockets could cause casualties when they landed on target they were strictly an 'area weapon', difficult to aim with any accuracy. (Private collection)

Transport

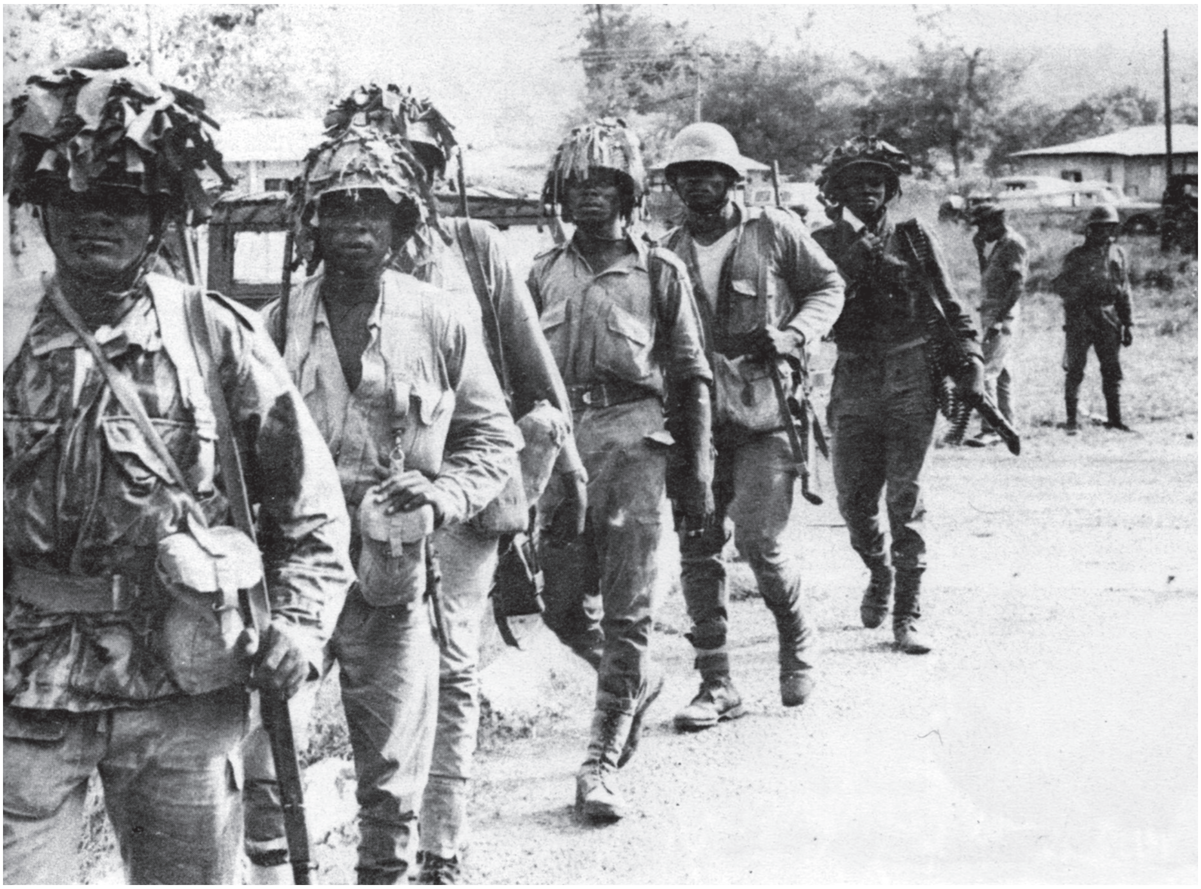
The vehicles taken from the Federal Army's Eastern Command in May 1967 had to last the Biafrans throughout the war. According to the most reliable source they had nine command cars, 115 Land Rovers and 200 trucks. Some 80 Land Rovers were seconded from the various government ministries at the start of the war, and some of these were fitted with Czech heavy machine guns. The Peugeot 404 station wagon was one of the most frequently used civilian vehicles employed by the Biafrans, who requisitioned large numbers of them from commercial businesses in 1967. Civilian trucks known as 'mammy wagons' were also pressed into military service, most of them dating from before 1945. The Biafrans also had a fair number of quarter-ton Austin light trucks, and they used a number of Honda 90cc and 250cc motorcycles. The lack of spare parts soon reduced the number of vehicles the Biafrans could keep serviceable, leading inevitably to cannibalization. No matter how many vehicles the army had, the shortage of fuel meant that only a fraction of them could be kept on the road at any one time. Ambulances were in short supply on both sides during the war, and casualties often had to be evacuated by porters.

UNIFORMS

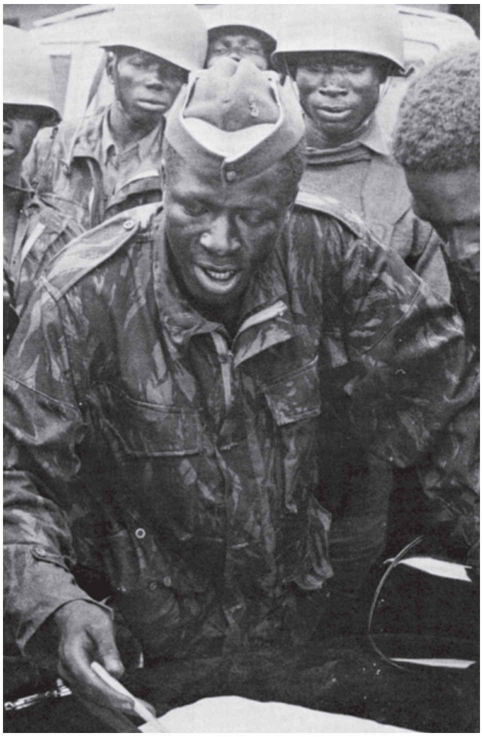
NIGERIAN FEDERAL ARMY

The field dress of the Nigerian Army at independence comprised the British Mk II steel helmet, khaki flannel shirt and khaki-drill cotton battledress trousers, short ankle-puttees or web anklets, leather 'ammunition boots' or 'boots, direct molded sole', and 37-pattern webbing equipment. The Nigerian contingent serving with the United Nations forces in the Congo in the early 1960s were issued from UN stores with mid-green shirts and trousers – again, of the battledress style, with a large pocket outside the left thigh and a smaller one at the right hip. Berets, when worn, were pulled down to the right in British Army style.

The new uniforms introduced in 1963 were basically the same as those issued in the Congo, and this 'jungle-green' clothing was issued to most soldiers of the newly raised battalions of the rapidly enlarged army in 1967. However, the sheer scale of the army's expansion meant that at least initially the 'other ranks' were lucky to have a single set of uniform and one pair of boots. Camouflaged uniform jackets and trousers began to be issued to some troops in 1967, in a distinctive Nigerian 'lizard' pattern (see Plate B1). The base colour was a neutral dusty shade, overprinted with basically vertical stripes in dark green and brown. The loose but fairly short camouflage jacket or smock had four pockets, and a fly front over a full-length zip fastener, giving the opened neck the same appearance as the British airborne troops' Denison smock. From photographic evidence, the narrowly tailored camouflage trousers sometimes seem to have had inconspicuous internal pockets on the fronts of both thighs, but these were too tight to be used as cargo pockets. As the war progressed shirts and bush hats were also made in the same camouflage pattern, sometimes with a light green base shade, and were worn mixed with khaki and



Nigerian infantry advance near Nsukka on the northern war front during the fighting of July 1967, when this university town was captured by the Federal 1st Division. Nsukka was defended by a mixture of poorly armed Biafran militia and a handful of regular troops, and quickly fell. These soldiers wear a typical mix of camouflaged, jungle-green and khaki-drill clothing, with M1-style steel helmets, partial British 58-pattern webbing, and FN FAL/SLR rifles. (Peter Obe)



A Nigerian officer, wearing the 'Denison'-style four-pocket camouflage smock, runs his men through the plan for the next day's attack against Biafran positions. His pre-war sidecap is a British-style 'field service cap' in dark green woollen cloth with a white front flap and piping to the turn-up; on the left front it sometimes bore a small version of the standard brass Federal Army badge. This cap was synonymous with career soldiers, since it was unobtainable after the start of the civil war. (Private collection)

jungle-green items. Jungle-green shirts, jackets and trousers were still worn by many Federal officers and rankers, in shades varying from item to item. In severe weather and for guard duties waterproof ponchos were issued, as well as old British Army khaki woollen sweaters (see Plate A2).

Headgear for other ranks was usually a jungle-green or camouflaged 'floppy' short-brimmed bush hat, which could easily be produced in local workshops. Three main models of combat helmets were worn by the Federal Army, although initially even British 1915 'Brodie' helmets might occasionally be seen. Much more numerous were the Mk II dating from *c.*1937–43, and the 1944 Mk III 'turtle' pattern. As the war continued these were seen less often, and the vast majority in use became the US M1 or similar NATO copies.[1] A feature of Nigerian steel helmets were the slogans painted or stencilled on them by individuals, perhaps in imitation of those seen in photographs or TV footage from Vietnam. These included religious or random phrases (e.g. 'Hosanna', 'Oh God', 'I Like You' and 'War Time'), but more popular than these were 'battle names' (e.g. 'Jungle Killer', 'The Easy Boy' and 'Joe Bazooka').

One practice seen in many photos was the substitution of a plasticized fibre helmet liner worn alone without the steel shell. While these liners may have 'looked the part', they naturally had no protective qualities at all; nevertheless, they continued to be worn by many Nigerian and Biafran troops alike throughout the war. Some commentators have suggested that even if soldiers were issued with the full steel helmet some of them may have preferred the lightweight but useless liners to the protective but heavy shells (the Federal Army, after all, very seldom faced artillery fire). It was also common practice to wear a bush hat under the helmet or the liner.

Officers' uniforms

Officers pre-1967 had ceremonial, service and field uniforms, as well as mess dress, but during the civil war ceremonial and mess orders of dress were rarely seen. The service dress consisted of a green cap with a black patent-leather peak, and a red band for senior ranks; a short-sleeved bush jacket with an integral belt, and plain trousers, both in a mid-green corduroy cloth known as 'kano', and brown leather laced shoes (see Plate A3, though he has a different cap). A leather 'Sam Browne' belt with a shoulder brace was added depending upon the order of dress.

Field uniforms worn by officers during the war were a mix of service and field items. They often wore the same shirts, jackets and trousers as the enlisted ranks, but presumably they got the pick of any new deliveries. Some officers wore well-pressed single-piece jungle-green overalls (see Plate C1); a few wore khaki windcheater jackets or flight jackets. Footwear was usually black British DMS boots, higher black combat boots from

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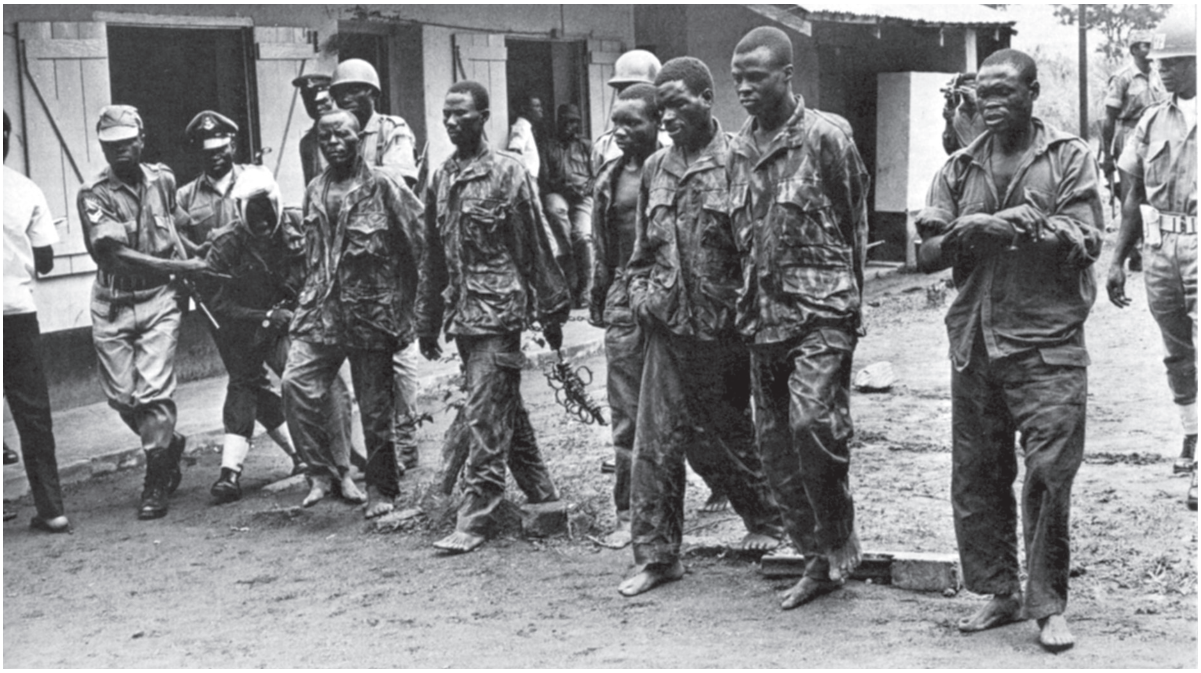
[1] Post-1945 helmets very similar to the M1 included the Danish M48, Belgian M51, Netherlands M53, West German and Austrian M58s, and Spanish M65. The West German M56 had a more 'high-domed' liner with a less pronounced front brim, which remained in service for non-combat use ('Protokolhelm') after the two-piece helmet was replaced by a one-piece steel design. In photos, helmet liners can often be identified from steel helmets by having visible rivet heads for the internal strapping, thinner rims and a single-piece narrow chinstrap, and NATO liners sometimes have a more domed shape and straighter lower edge than the M1, but exact identification is always difficult.



In the early weeks of the civil war, fully uniformed Biafran troops and military police bring in Federal Army captives; these are claimed to be some of the Chadian mercenaries who reportedly fought with the Nigerians. In the early months of the war the Biafran Army could field small units that were as well turned-out as these men, but as their pre-war uniforms wore out any replacements usually had to be locally made. (Private collection)

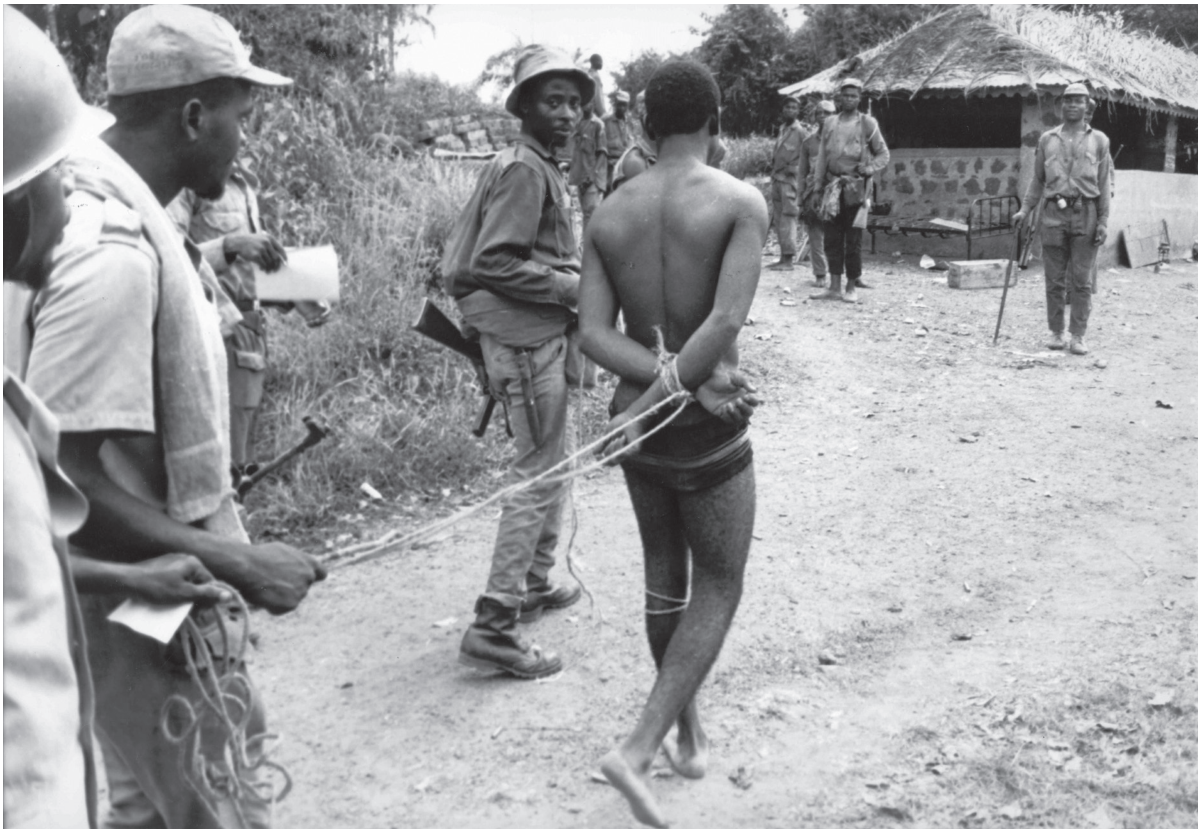
commercial sources, or British canvas-and-rubber jungle boots. Headgear worn by Federal officers in the field included berets, peaked service caps (with junior ranks apparently wearing British khaki-brown instead of Nigerian green), sidecaps or bush hats. The wearing of the green and white service-dress sidecap almost invariably identified the wearer as a pre-war officer, as they were unobtainable by wartime-commissioned officers of the enlarged army. New officers usually had to make do with readily available bush hats, which marked them out as ‘green’ to their more experienced comrades.

Coloured British-style fabric stable belts were a popular item amongst Federal officers and some senior NCOs; although these – and matching shoulder lanyards in branch-of-service colours – should have been confined to barracks dress, they were often seen being worn in the field. Examples were the Infantry’s red belt (see Plate C1); the Reconnaissance troops’ green belt with a narrow yellow stripe, and green/yellow twist lanyard, worn with their green beret; the Engineers’ plain blue belt and white lanyard; the Medical officers’ khaki belt and maroon lanyard; and the Artillery officers’ belt and lanyard in blue, red and yellow (see Plate C2). The general service beret was midnight blue.

Insignia

In the Federal Army, officers’ rank insignia followed the British system, but with a raised six-pointed star replacing the British ‘pip’, and a Nigerian eagle device replacing the field-grade officers’ royal crown. Nigerian NCOs wore white sleeve chevrons, point downwards, in the usual sequence: 1 to 3 for lance-corporal, corporal and sergeant.

The Federal Army had little in the way of unit insignia, and even when authorized these were not always worn. Formation upper-sleeve patches were worn on both arms. Some personnel wore the 1st Division’s red ‘1’ on a blue triangle during the war. A patch for the 2nd Division does appear



Biafran soldiers of a later date bring a Federal prisoner in to a jungle headquarters to be interrogated; he has been stripped down to his underwear, his precious uniform and equipment shared out amongst his captors. Neither side were always willing to take prisoners, and this unfortunate soldier has at least escaped summary execution in the bush. (Romano Cagnoni)

to have been designed, but there is no photographic evidence that it was ever worn during the conflict; it is supposed to have been a white hand with outstretched index finger on a square green background. Officers and men of the 3rd Marine Division were encouraged to wear its distinctive black octopus and '3' on a square red patch. Some soldiers displayed the simple national flash, as worn by the UN contingent in the Congo: a rectangular bar with equal vertical stripes of green, white and green.

Nigerian Navy and Air Force

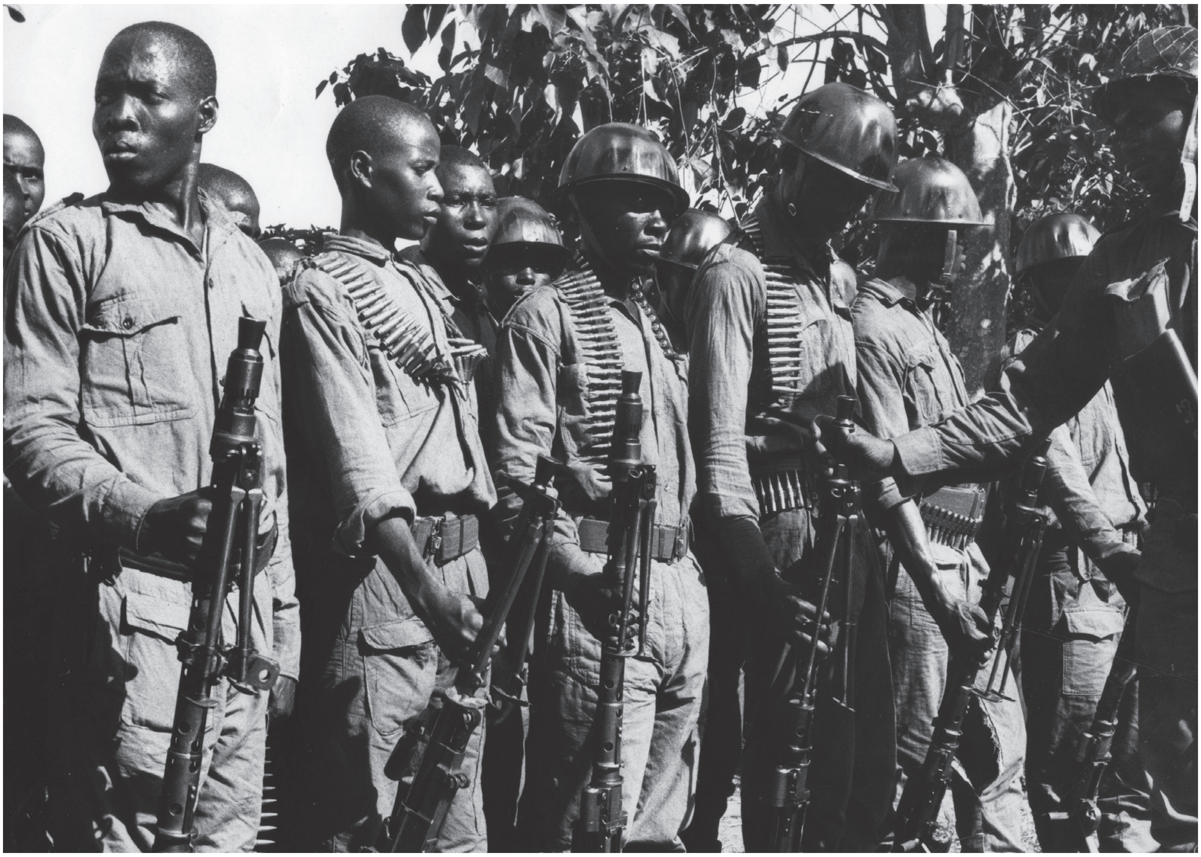
Nigerian Navy uniforms were almost identical to those worn by the British Royal Navy, with pre-independence rank badges being retained. The new cap badge was introduced in 1963, with the Nigerian eagle replacing the British crown (see Plate D2). Officers' service dress was either a white shirt and shorts or a white bush jacket worn with trousers. Ratings wore white jumpers with either white or navy-blue trousers, and white webbing gaiters for parades. White naval vests and shorts were worn with long white or blue socks for service dress, while the work uniform had light blue shirts and dark blue trousers. The standard RN-style seaman's cap was worn mainly with a white top but sometimes in navy-blue, depending on the season.

When the Nigerian Air Force was formed in 1964 its personnel initially wore one-piece overalls with US-style garrison caps (sidecaps) bearing the Federal Army badge. In 1965 a new khaki service-dress uniform for officers was introduced, similar to that worn by the Army but with rank on dark blue shoulder boards or slides depending upon order of dress (see D3). Blue-grey caps were similar to those worn by the British RAF but with the new NAF cloth badge. Other ranks wore a light blue shirt, blue-grey trousers and an Army-style sidecap. In 1967 a blue-grey service dress was introduced for officers, but, as in the Army, under wartime constraints old and new uniform items tended to be worn together.

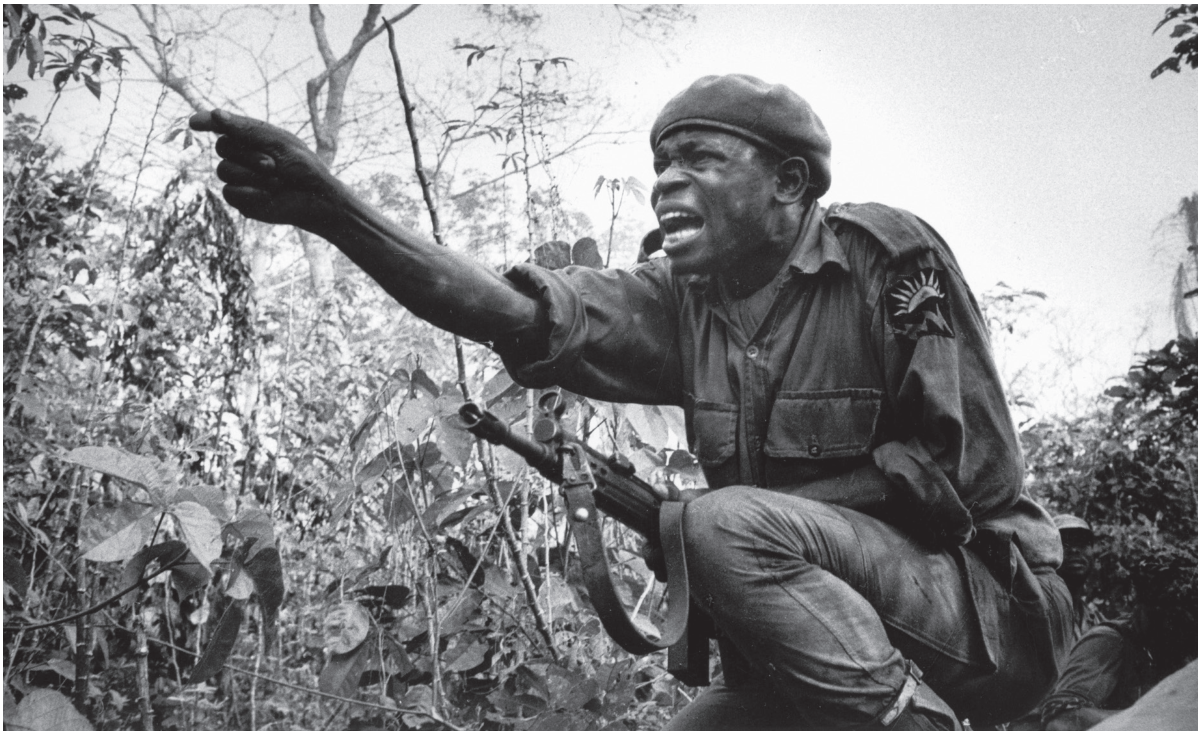
BIAFRAN ARMY

The Biafran Army wore a wide variety of clothing during the war, and had great difficulty replacing the initial issues when they wore out. Some troops were issued with full uniforms at the outbreak of the war (see Plate E2) but as the army expanded these were in short supply. As in the Federal Army, many combinations of jungle-green, khaki-drill and latterly camouflage uniforms were employed. In many cases only one or two items of military clothing were worn with otherwise civilian garments (see Plate F2), and often the only uniform item worn was the iconic Biafran 'rising-sun' sleeve patch sewn on a civilian shirt.

When cloth was obtainable it was dyed either jungle-green or in camouflage patterns before being made up into uniforms by local tailors. Desperate measures often had to be taken in attempts to clothe Biafran troops. At one time grey 'baft' cloth was taken from warehouses, dyed green and made into uniforms, but these only lasted two weeks before falling apart because of the total unsuitability of the fabric used. Several textile mills and workshops were converted to produce jungle-green and French-style camouflage shirts and trousers.



Biafran machine-gunners pose with their weapons for inspection before going into action in 1968. They wear khaki-drill uniforms, a couple of them with British 37-pattern web belts, and those on the right have the Biafran-made 'fluted' helmets issued in large numbers early in the war (see Plate H2). Two types of weapon are visible: the German MG34 of World War II vintage, and the Czech VZ-59 GPMG. Both probably came from the same source, as captured MG34s were used by the Czech Army from 1945. (Private collection)



This Biafran sergeant of 'S' Div was photographed going into action near Owerri in 1969; the photographer recorded that he was killed the day after this shot was taken. His red-on-black lightning-flash sleeve insignia (see Plate F1) can just be seen below the rising-sun patch. Biafran Army berets came in any colour, and some were in a light khaki-brown shade; he also wears a neckerchief, perhaps in a sub-unit identifying colour. (Romano Cagnoni)

Rolf Steiner, commander of the 4th Cdo Bde, at one time kitted out his whole unit by buying a consignment of white cloth from a Greek trader. He had it dyed jungle-green, then cut and sewn by a few local 'master' tailors with 50 assistants with sewing machines to fit the men individually. He then acquired enough footwear for his men by doing a favour for a fellow German who owned a shoe factory, for which the price was 2,000 pairs of boots. During 1968 the brigade received large numbers of new uniforms in the so-called 'duck-hunter' camouflage pattern based on US M1942 uniforms, which had remained popular (mainly in the Far East) during the post-war period. In the last year of the war 'duck-hunter' uniforms became more widely available in Biafra.

It appears that the only steel helmets in anything approaching common use were US M1s or NATO equivalents captured from the Federal Army. Helmets were always in short supply, with some units reportedly having only one per 50 men. Like their Nigerian opponents the Biafrans often decorated their helmets, with slogans or rising-sun badges. They sometimes bore phrases like 'Biafra Win' or similar proclamations, while one was seen with the intriguing words 'Jasper Black Tiger of the Day' written across it. The Biafrans also produced their own model of helmet, made from sheet metal or even discarded milk tins. These were cut to size using cardboard patterns, then pressed or hammered over a head-shaped former, producing something resembling a construction worker's fluted 'hard hat' of that period (see Plate G2). From photographic evidence it appears that they were in widespread use, though their protective qualities were doubtful. Some Biafrans, like their opponents, also wore liners from the M1 and similar helmets in place of the steel shells.

Footwear was as various as any other items, usually either captured or imported, and they also wore rubber 'Wellingtons' ('gum boots'). When combat boots did arrive they were usually foreign army surplus, and soldiers had to search for matching pairs from piles of old ones. Many Biafran soldiers were forced to go barefoot or wear any civilian shoes that they could get their hands on. These included totally unsuitable fashion shoes like 'winkle pickers', and those donated by international charities to be worn by civilians. Home-made shoes were fashioned from any available material including tarpaulin and rubber tyres. The shortage of footwear meant that throughout the whole of 1969 no new boots at all were issued to the Biafra Army.

As with everything else, the Biafrans used any captured uniforms they could find; these might include the clothing and equipment of Nigerian patrols killed or captured in battle, but on one occasion 2,000 Federal uniforms were taken during a riverine operation. Many Biafran soldiers became obsessed with trying to capture uniforms from the enemy almost to the exclusion of other objectives, stripping the dead and any prisoners and adding their own insignia if available. (The Federal Army once even planted uniforms and equipment in a particular pre-selected area on which their artillery had already been ranged in.) Even if a Biafran soldier was lucky enough to be issued with a uniform when he joined the army he was unlikely to receive replacements as his garments wore out with hard use in punishing terrain and climate. In the southern Biafra sector there were two issues of uniform during 1969, but in insufficient quantities to go around.

Officers' uniforms

At the start of the war Biafran officers who had served in the Federal Army usually wore their pre-1967 uniforms with Nigerian insignia removed. These were sufficient at first, but could not be replaced once they had been worn out. In 1967 any officers with spare uniform items were ordered to donate them to newly commissioned officers who had none at all.

Khaki-drill cotton uniforms seem to have been popular in the early part of the war, but by 1969 these had mostly disappeared. In the last year of the war many officers were issued with new uniform shirts or jackets and trousers made from 'duck-hunter' camouflage material. Headgear was surviving peaked service caps or, much more often, field caps of the (inaccurately) so-called 'Fidel Castro' style. Most officers had a brass field-cap badge with the design of an eagle atop an elephant's tusk with the word 'BIAFRA' across it, above entwined 'horseshoe' shapes which represented the old currency of the region. One extrovert Biafran commander, Col 'Hannibal' Achuzie, for some reason painted the eagle and tusk on his cap badge red. Most officers' peaked service caps bore the Biafran coat-of-arms as an embroidered cloth badge (see page 47).

Insignia

Biafran NCOs had golden-yellow chevrons following the same system as the Federal Army, with staff sergeants distinguished by an eagle-and-tusk above their three chevrons. Junior officers also followed the basic Nigerian system, with one to three stars for subalterns and captains. Majors had an eagle-and-tusk, lieutenant-colonels and colonels the same with one and two stars. General officers had one and two stars above the eagle device and the Biafran coat-of-arms beneath; full generals wore two stars above crossed swords.

The national yellow and black sleeve patch, which was easy and cheap to produce, was ubiquitous on most uniforms and para-military clothing. It came in slightly differing designs, but showed a yellow rising sun with alternate straight and wavy rays, above a yellow horizontal bar representing the land of Biafra, on a black rectangular patch usually bordered in yellow.

Some Biafran formations and units did wear their own distinctive insignia in addition to the national patch. That of the elite 'S' Bde, later 'S' Div, was a black rectangular patch with a red lightning flash running across it (see Plate F3). The most famous insignia was the white skull-and-crossbones on a black patch of the 4th Cdo Bde, later Div (see Plates G2 & G3). The various units of the brigade were also distinguished by coloured neckerchiefs. Commandos of the Guards unit led by 'Taffy' Williams wore bright blue scarves; those of Armand Iaranelli's Ahoada Strike Force wore them in red (a few men of this battalion were also seen wearing red berets); and Abaliki Strike Force commanded by Johnny Erasmus wore yellow scarves. Green berets and white scarves seem to have identified Steiner's HQ element and/or its guard. Some men of the brigade wore steel helmets also stencilled on the front with the death's-head insignia.

Photographic evidence is scarce, but most Biafran formation and unit insignia seem to have been limited to Roman numerals. Some men of the 12th Div displayed a white-on-black 'XII' (see Plate F3), and photos of 5th and 7th Bn personnel show 'V' and 'VII' patches. By contrast, the 14th Bn is described as displaying the Arabic numerals '14'. In most cases the battalion numerals were in white on a black cloth patch, but other examples were black on white or yellow. Other sleeve insignia did exist, but the lack of dress regulations and the poor quality of photographic evidence does not allow for identification. Biafran military police did wear black armbands with red stencilled or painted letters 'MP', and troops serving in a command post wore black armbands with the white letters 'CP'.

Biafran Navy and Air Force

According to regulations the Biafran Navy's uniform consisted of light blue fatigue shirts and dark blue trousers, with shoulder boards of rank for officers. Ratings wore dark blue berets and officers the typical naval peaked cap, until the shortage of cap badges led to its replacement by berets. Parade uniform for officers was supposed to be white short-sleeved shirts and dark blue woollen trousers. According to one report a total of $278,000 was spent in the UK purchasing Navy uniforms; these were presumably Royal Navy surplus, and the tropical white dress was reportedly worn.

Air Force uniforms for the small number of Biafran aircrew were put together from whatever was available. Jungle-green shirts and trousers of various shades appear to have been popular, with rank worn on the shoulder straps. A brass metal BAF badge was worn either on a jungle-green US-style garrison cap or on the front of a peaked or field cap (see Plate H3). From photographic evidence it appears that officers' service uniform was a blue-grey peaked cap, light khaki bush-jacket with integral belt and matching trousers, and a white shirt with a black necktie.

PLATE COMMENTARIES

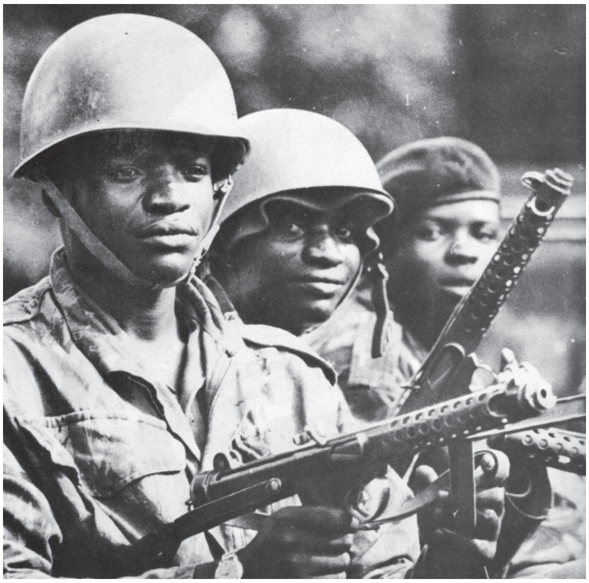
A: NIGERIAN FORCES, 1967

A1: Sergeant, Police Mobile Force, Mid-Western Region

When Biafran troops invaded the Mid-West in August 1967 they were faced by few regular Federal forces. Armed policemen were formed into the Police Mobile Force and were used to bolster the over-stretched Federal Army, although they were equipped and trained for crowd control rather than combat. This sergeant is wearing standard Police uniform semi-militarized by the issue of British khaki-drill battledress trousers and jungle boots. The midnight-blue beret has the silver Police badge **(see inset)**, the grey-blue shirt has silver buttons, and British-style red rank chevrons on both sleeves; and the black leather belt has a silver Police buckle. His haversack is a British surplus Royal Air Force 37-pattern 'small pack' hanging slung from a shoulder brace. Hanging from the haversack is a British surplus steel helmet, either 1915 pattern or Mk II, painted glossy blue, with a red band around it and 'POLICE' stencilled in white on the front. This was used pre-war for riot control, along with wicker shields and truncheons. The Nigerian Police were armed with either Sterling L2A3 sub-machine guns or, as in this case, Lee–Enfield No. 4 Mk I rifles.

A2: Corporal, Federal Army 1st Division, Nsukka

This NCO is a veteran of the large West African contingent that fought with the British Army in Burma in 1944–45, who has volunteered to fight again after more than 20 years. He is serving with the force which captured the university town of Nsukka in northern Biafra in July 1967. For the second time in his life he has been issued a British Mk II helmet, here characteristically camouflaged with a string net and hanging strips of khaki and green cloth 'scrim'. Over his khaki-drill shirt his brown woollen V-necked pullover is also ex-British Army World War II issue, to which he has sewn his two white rank chevrons on both sleeves. British 1950 khaki-drill trousers are worn with 37-pattern webbing anklets and rubber-soled DMS boots. His equipment is British 58-pattern from Federal Army stores: the belt, shoulder yoke, two pouches, and a water bottle-carrier at his right hip. Italian 7.62mm Beretta BM59 semi-automatic rifles were used by the Federal Army in the early stage of the war alongside FN FALs (and some fell into Biafran hands); this is the 'Mk Ital' model, with a permanently attached grenade-launcher and sight and a folding bipod.



A trio of Federal soldiers stand guard over their vehicles armed with Sterling L2A3 sub-machine guns. The nearest man is wearing the four-pocket camouflage jacket with a 'Denison'-type zip fastening extending to the neck. He has an M1 or NATO-copy steel helmet; the central man has turned his helmet back-to-front, and wears it over a bush hat. The third man wears a coloured beret; if (as seems possible) these men belong to an armoured Recce unit, it would be green, and it may bear the brass Federal Army badge on the left-hand side. (Peter Obe)

A3: Captain, Federal Army 11th Battalion, Mid-Western Region

Officers of the Federal Army wore a variety of service and field uniforms at the start of the war. This dapper-looking captain of the 11th Battalion is wearing a white silk cravat with the service dress made from a fine mid-green corduroy 'kano' cloth. The short-sleeved bush jacket with four big pockets, prominent diagonal chest seams, gold buttons, and an integral cloth belt is worn with trousers made from the same material, and officers' brown leather shoes. His British-style khaki-brown woollen service cap has a cloth-covered peak (visor), and the gilt brass badge worn by officers up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel at the start of the war. On his shoulder straps he displays his rank by three pyramid-shaped six-point brass stars; the two ribbons above his left breast pocket show the award of the Independence Medal and the Forces Service Star. The map case is British Army surplus.

B: FEDERAL ARMY, 1968

B1: Lance-Corporal, 1st Division

This section leader is wearing the British Mk III 'turtle' steel helmet seen in service during the early stages of the civil war. His loose, hip-length, four-pocket camouflage jacket has a front zipper concealed by a fly flap, and a neck cut like the British Denison smock. The camouflage pattern, with streaks of brown and dark green over a pale neutral colour, has a largely vertical orientation resembling that of the Portuguese pattern of 1964. On both upper sleeves he displays **(see inset)** the patch of the 1st Div, above the single white cloth chevron of his rank. The trousers in the same pattern are cut slim, in the fashion of armies of the 1960s, and worn loose over ex-British DMS leather boots. His minimal belt equipment is 58-pattern apart from the 44-pattern water bottle, whose generously proportioned carrier could also be used as a general-purpose 'holdall' pouch. He is armed with a 9mm Sterling L2A3 sub-machine gun, as often issued to Nigerian NCOs and Military Police personnel.

B2: Machine-gunner, 2nd Division

This jungle-green shirtsleeve uniform was worn, in varying shades, by most Federal troops during the Civil War. The helmet shown is in fact the plasticized fibre liner from a US M1, camouflaged with netting and rag 'scrim'. The shirt bears no insignia; the battledress trousers are again worn loose over British-supplied boots. He has been issued with minimal

58-pattern webbing – simply the belt, and a single pouch to carry spares and tools for his West German 7.62mm M3 machine gun (the re-calibred NATO version of the 7.92mm wartime German MG42). Nigerian infantry advances were often led by several machine gunners spraying the surrounding jungle with thousands of rounds in 'reconnaissance by fire'; note his abundant supply of 'link' belts in contrast to the chronic shortages suffered by his Biafran opponents.

B3: Private, 2nd Division

Apart from World War II veterans in the 1st Div, many younger Nigerian soldiers had also seen active service in the Congo in 1960–63 and 1967 as part of the United Nations forces. This private, newly issued with a British L2A2 hand grenade, is wearing the liner from an M1 steel helmet (identified by the rivet-heads and single narrow leather chinstrap), with 'Jim Bullet' painted across the front. Many Nigerian soldiers displayed battle names like this, either given to them by their comrades or self-adopted. Underneath the liner he wears a bush hat – which thus acts, rather bizarrely, as a liner for his liner, which is a substitute for his helmet… The jungle-green shirt, here worn over a civilian string vest (jungle nights were often chilly), varied in colour from man to man, and in many units no two were the same shade. 'Jim Bullet's' trousers, held up by a 58-pattern belt with the metal fittings (unusually) polished bright, are in the usual Federal Army camouflage pattern, and are tucked into British-supplied jungle boots. His rifle is a West German 7.62mm Heckler & Koch G3.

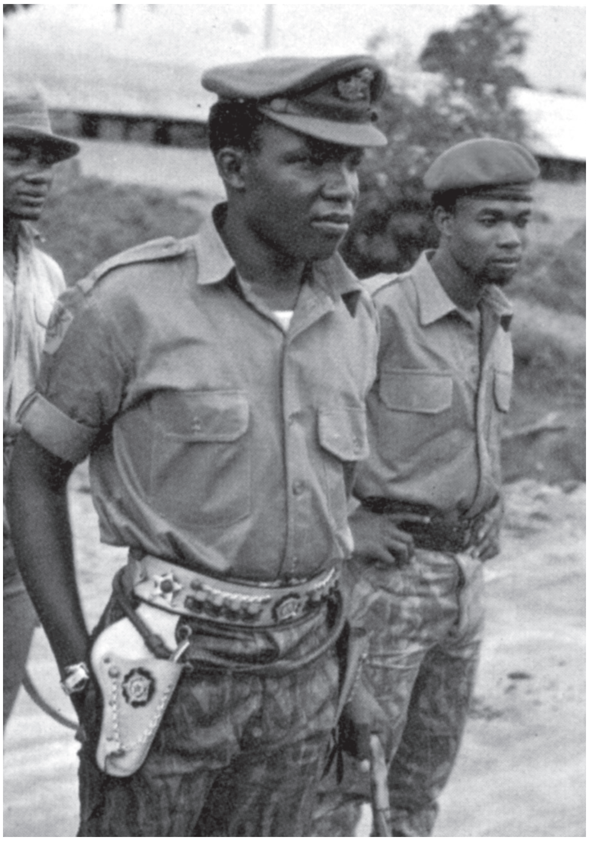
C: FEDERAL ARMY 3rd MARINE DIVISION

C1: Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, 1968

The 3rd Marine Div's commander was one of the most volatile and colourful characters to emerge from the Civil War. His usually exaggerated military prowess led to fawning followers bestowing titles such as the 'Black Scorpion', the 'Black Rommel' or the 'Black Napoleon' (though the fear he aroused in both his troops and Western journalists led the latter to invent far less complimentary nicknames when safely out of his earshot). In this portrait he is wearing the senior officers' dark green service cap with a scarlet band and black patent-leather chinstrap and peak. For colonel's rank the peak has a single broad edging of gold foliate braid, and the big, red-backed, embroidered cap badge also has single gold edging. Adekunle's neatly tailored and pressed jungle-green one-piece overalls show the 3rd Marine Div's octopus sleeve patch **(see inset)**; his detachable shoulder straps bear the gold eagle and two six-point stars of full colonel's rank, and his collar points show a short version of the red staff tabs with a gold button and braid stripe. Most photos of Adekunle show this broad red Infantry stable belt with a narrow open gilt buckle. The overalls are tucked into imported high black combat boots. He is handling a 9mm Beretta M1951 semi-automatic pistol, and is also armed with his personal 'swagger stick'. Made from a sawn-off golf club, this was used to strike any of his men who annoyed him, and also to threaten the Western journalists whom he alternately charmed and terrified.

C2: Artillery lieutenant, 1968

At the start of the war the division had no artillery support, and this lieutenant has been tasked with helping to organize the reception of newly delivered Italian 105mm howitzers. Bush hats were issued to Federal Army officers in large numbers as a substitute for pre-war peaked caps and sidecaps, which were virtually unobtainable by the huge numbers of wartime-commissioned officers in the expanded Army. The use of a bush hat often indicated the relative inexperience of an officer, although this man has seen pre-1967 service. His jungle-green shirt displays the divisional patch on each sleeve, two rank stars on his shoulder straps, and a blue, red and yellow Artillery lanyard. Holding up his camouflage trousers is the Artillery stable belt striped in those colours, with a silver buckle plate bearing the Nigerian coat of arms, and he has British-supplied jungle boots.



An officer of the 3rd Marine Div poses for the news cameras during his unit's advances in southern Biafra in 1968. He wears the British-style khaki-brown peaked service cap with the brass Army badge; since pre-war green service caps were almost unobtainable during the wartime Army's expansion they became, in practice, exclusive to senior officers with pre-war uniforms. His jungle-green shirt bears the divisional patch on both sleeves, but no apparent rank badges. His and his companion's camouflage trousers may have inconspicuous internal pockets on the fronts of both thighs. Soldiers would often display loot from captured towns; for some unknown reason this officer has decided to sport a child's toy 'Wild West' gunbelt. (Private collection)

C3: Infantry private, 1969–70

Unusually, the photo on which we base this figure shows a large decal of the division's 'octopus-and-3' insignia on the front of his helmet liner; on the side he has neatly applied the word 'HOSANNA' to show his Christian allegiance. He wears the often-seen mix of camouflage and jungle-green clothing; the former is here a lightweight two-pocket version with a conventional shirt-cut collar and buttons down the front, and his jungle-green trousers are of characteristically slim outline. His jungle boots and 58-pattern webbing belt equipment are, as usual, from British sources. Late in the war units were often seen in the field with equal numbers of the FN FAL (British SLR) and this German H&K G3.

D: NIGERIAN ARMY, NAVY & AIR FORCE, 1967–70

D1: Private, Federal Army Military Police; Owerri, 1970

This military policeman is part of the security force at a surrender ceremony of the Biafran Army in January 1970. He is wearing the liner from one of the NATO copies of the US M1 helmet, with a taller-domed and straighter-edged appearance than the American original. With a clean Federal-pattern camouflage uniform he wears a dark blue armband with red cutout letters 'MP' sewn on. On his British 37-pattern web belt he wears magazine pouches for his Soviet AKM assault rifle.

D2: Lieutenant, Navy, 1967

This junior officer wears regulation British RN-style tropical/summer service uniform of white-topped peaked cap, white cotton bush jacket with gold buttons and integral belt, matching trousers, and white suede shoes. The cap is identical to the RN version apart from the new Nigerian badge, which replaced the crown with an eagle. The navy-blue detachable shoulder boards followed the same sequence of gold rank stripes and 'curls' as the pre-independence Navy. Ratings wore the same uniform as the Royal Navy, with a light blue shirt and dark blue trousers for work duties. On the band-tallies of their white summer and blue winter caps the crews of the named vessels displayed in gold, e.g. 'NNS NIGERIA'.

D3: Colonel Shittu Alao, Chief of Air Staff, 1968

Sporting the ritual scars from his boyhood in Plateau State, the NAF commander wears a cold-weather service uniform, with a long-sleeved khaki bush jacket worn over a shirt and tie. The blue-grey service cap has gold decoration around the black peak, and the embroidered Air Force badge **(see inset)** introduced in 1965 with the new uniform. His shoulder straps bear his rank badges of a gilt eagle and two six-pointed stars; Air Force ranks were reportedly ordered worn on dark blue shoulder boards, but these were not always available. Staff collar tabs worn by senior NAF officers were identical to the Army type. On his left breast the colonel wears gilt metal NAF 'wings'; he had qualified as a pilot during a year-long training secondment to the West German Air Force. In his briefcase he no doubt carries reports for Gen Gowon on the development of the Nigerian Air Force. Colonel Alao was one of several Nigerian senior officers killed during the civil war; he died in December 1969, when crash-landing an L-29 during bad weather.

E: BIAFRAN FORCES, 1967

E1: Militiaman, Enugu

During the early months of the war the small Biafran Army had their numbers bolstered by militiamen like this man, from groups raised in the major towns. With very few resources available for the regular army, the Militia had to clothe and equip themselves as best they could. The only para-military item worn by this volunteer is a light khaki field cap camouflaged with foliage and grass. (For some reason all Biafran peaked field caps seem to have been called 'Fidel caps', although they did not at all resemble the stiffened olive-drab US Army M1943 'Walker cap' favoured by Fidel Castro himself.) He has bought himself a suitably patriotic T-shirt from a market stall; several Militia groups were issued T-shirts with designs particular to their unit. Other clothing was also usually civilian. He is armed with a typical 'Dane gun' manufactured in a local workshop for hunting game; although it is primitive, it is better than the machetes that were all that many militiamen could obtain.

E2: Private, Biafran Army

In the early days of the Civil War the Biafran Army issued smart pale khaki uniforms to a minority of its few hundred troops, and this soldier's outfit is so impressively complete that he may well belong to Col Ojukwu's personal guard from 'S' Brigade. The field cap has a stitched peak, and earflaps that could be either tucked up inside or tied over the top. On the front is a brass metal badge of an eagle clutching an elephant's tusk, with 'BIAFRA' diagonally across it. On the upper sleeves of his light khaki cotton military shirt he has the Biafran national rising-sun patch **(see inset)**. His matching trousers are tucked into black combat boots of unidentified origin; the British Army did not switch from the 'boots direct molded sole' to the 'boots combat high' (to British troops, 'boots cardboard horrible') until the mid-1980s. His equipment is made up of an ancient British 1908-pattern web belt and two drab canvas-and-leather magazine pouches provided to Biafra along with the Czechoslovakian 7.62mm VZ-52 semi-automatic rifle. This weapon has a spring bayonet folded down beside the right of the forestock.

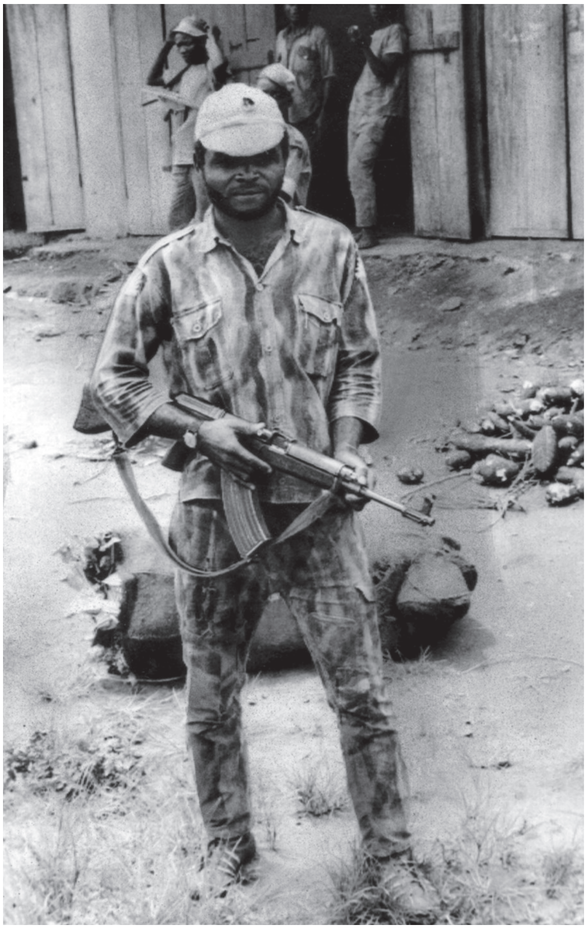
E3: Militia officer, Enugu

In the Biafran capital shortly after the proclamation of independence this Militia officer, a university lecturer turned para-military commander, is instructing volunteers in the art of personal camouflage. He has been able to put together a uniform of sorts: a privately made light grey field cap and shirt, with British Army 1950 tropical trousers and civilian basketball boots. Although many Militia officers and men wore civilian clothing some were reported to wear grey uniforms, and a feature mentioned by eyewitnesses was the large black appliqué 'M' on the left shirtsleeve. When some militiamen were taken prisoner by the Federal Army in the early days of the war the 'M' confused some of their captors: Nigerian troops were said to be astounded that so many Biafran 'majors' should be operating in a single unit…

F: BIAFRAN ARMY, 1968–69

F1: Sergeant, 'S' Division, 1969

The 'S' Brigade, later expanded into a division, was raised as a force with special personal loyalty to Col Ojukwu; this had its rewards, and this NCO is well dressed and equipped by Biafran standards. One of the NATO copies of the M1 helmet is painted light green and covered with a string camouflage net, and he has both shirt and trousers in light khaki-drill cotton. On both upper sleeves he displays the Biafran rising-sun patch above the 'S' Div's lightning flash patch **(see inset)**, and below these the yellow chevrons of his rank. He has been very fortunate to be issued with a new pair of British boots, when many of his comrades were going barefoot by this stage of the war. Equipment is a mix of British and Czech items: 58-pattern webbing with one pouch, plus a light brown leather Czechoslovakian pouch for the 'banana' magazines of his VZ-58P assault rifle. Often mistaken for the outwardly similar



A Biafran sentry stands guard outside his barracks wearing a khaki-drill uniform that has been crudely camouflaged, probably with paint–a typical example of the wide variety of clothing employed. His headgear is the ubiquitous light khaki 'Fidel' field cap which was produced in large numbers in workshops all over the country. He has a Czech VZ-58 assault rifle, but like many Biafran soldiers he would have to carry any spare magazines in his pockets due to the shortage of web equipment. (Private collection)

Soviet AK-47, this was one of the best weapons that the Biafrans had managed to purchase before the war.

F2: Rocket crewman, Ahoada Strike Force, 1968

This boy is not a porter, but a soldier – part of a crew firing the home-made rockets developed by the Biafran RAP Dept to supplement their imported weaponry. He is carrying one of the rockets in the typical African fashion, here resting on a cloth pad held together with a length of tree-vine. The Ahoada Strike Force was a battalion of the 4th Cdo Bde and was commanded by the Corsican mercenary Armand 'The Brave' Iaranelli; it was distinguished from other units of the brigade by a red neckerchief. This volunteer's shorts and his 'gum boots' are civilian items which he would probably have brought with him from home. As part of the rocket crew he has not been issued with a rifle because of the scarcity of weapons, and he relies on his comrades for protection.

F3: Private, 12th Division, 1969

As with many Biafran troops by this date, this soldier's uniform is worn-out and incomplete and his equipment is non-existent. He has bought a civilian trilby at a local market to wear in lieu of field cap or helmet. His jungle-green shirt may be locally made or a battlefield capture; to both upper sleeves he has sewn the Biafran sun patch above the white-on-black 'XII' patch of the 12th Division. His worn-out British jungle boots have been taken from the body of a Federal soldier killed in an ambush. He has no web equipment apart from a British belt, and carries in his trouser pocket a precious spare magazine for his Spanish 7.62mm CETME M58 assault rifle.

G: MERCENARY-LED BIAFRAN UNITS, 1967–68

G1: Mercenary, Calabar, October 1967

A composite from several photos, this member of the French veteran Roger Faulques' ill-fated mercenary group is part of a Biafran force about 50 strong that attacked Federal positions in the town of Calabar shortly after its fall to the 3rd Marine Division. While Faulques was absent abroad on an arms-buying mission his men decided that they could easily take on the Federal troops, for whom they had little respect. The *ad hoc* force suffered heavily for their arrogance in attacking the dug-in Nigerians, losing five white mercenaries killed (a major loss, by their standards). When Faulques returned from France he cancelled the whole operation, and his surviving men went home with six months' advance pay in their pockets. This man's dark green beret pulled right in the British fashion, with a brass Armée Nationale Congolaise badge (with light blue in-fill, in an original photo from Biafra), identifies him as a former member of the 'Ango-Saxon' 5th Commando in the Congo. His combat uniform, made up in lightweight 'duck-hunter' camouflage cloth, is of oddly inconvenient design: a one-piece overall with a fly front, and only a single pocket on the left breast. The black boots appear to be French M1952 '*rangers*' with a two-buckle ankle flap. Photographs show that some of the mercenaries were armed with old British Lanchester Mk I sub-machine guns, using compatible 32-round Sten magazines instead of the original Lanchester 50-round type. Equipment is minimal, with only a belt and a Belgian copy of the British 37-pattern 'basic pouch'.

G2: Major Rolf Steiner, 4th Commando Brigade, summer 1968

The German commander of the 4th Cdo Bde wears a uniform recalling his previous service in the French Foreign Legion. The green beret pulled to the left and the silver French Army airborne troops' (TAP) badge were worn by his former unit, the disbanded 1er REP, and he displays his French jump wings on his right chest. The blouse is privately acquired, made up in French airborne troops' camouflage cloth; the exact colours are uncertain in monochrome photos, but we show one of the many variants. The 4th Cdo Bde skull-and-crossbones patch is worn beneath the rising-sun patch on both sleeves, and rank badges on the shoulder straps (Steiner was later promoted lieutenant-colonel). Photos show a light-coloured neckerchief, but this could be either in the white reportedly worn by the brigade's HQ element (which would be logical), the pale blue of the Guards, or the yellow of Abaliki Strike Force. The French M1947 paratrooper's trousers appear to be in a 1953 colour pattern, and are re-tailored to slim the legs. Steiner wears the type of canvas and rubber patrol boots that became widely popular in the 1950s–60s; resembling basketball boots, in Vietnam they were called 'pataugas' by the French and 'Bata boots' by Americans. The personal sidearm is a 9mm Browning Hi-Power semi-automatic pistol.

G3: Commando, 'Guards' unit, 4th Commando Division, November 1968

This young Biafran belongs to the battalion commanded by 'Taffy' Williams. He is wearing a field cap, shirt and trousers all locally made in 'duck-hunter' camouflage cloth. On the upper sleeves of his shirt he has the usual rising-sun patch above the skull-and-crossbones formation insignia. The light blue neckerchief was worn with pride by members of this 'elite' unit within an elite. His French canvas-and-rubber patrol boots have been supplied as part of the clandestine aid that the Biafrans received from France and her client African states between 1968 and 1970. His equipment is basic: a French airborne *musette d'allegement* TAP M1950, with a mix of US- and British-style metal fittings, which he wears as a back pack; and a World War II-type disposable cloth bandolier for his rifle clips. Bolt-action Mausers, usually Czech-made, were used by the Biafrans throughout the war. It might seem odd that this formation, of which so much was hoped, should receive the oldest weapon in the Biafran inventory, but the Mauser was valued for the fire-discipline it imposed. Even World War II-surplus 7.92mm ammunition was eventually in chronically short supply in Biafra.

H: BIAFRAN ARMY, NAVY & AIR FORCE, 1968–70

H1: General Philip Effiong, Chief of Biafran General Staff, January 1970

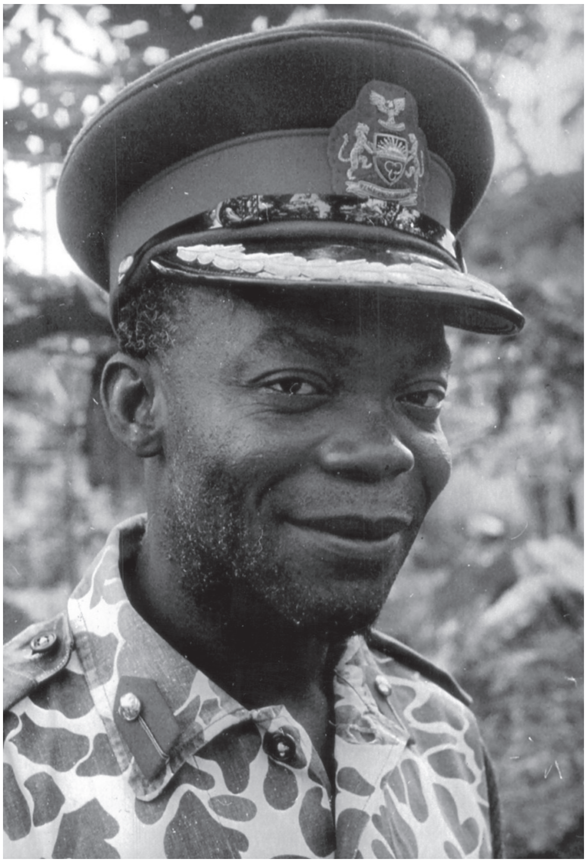
His peaked cap is one that he has kept from his pre-civil war uniform: Nigerian green with a red band, rebadged with a gold-embroidered Biafran coat-of-arms on red backing; black patent leather chinstrap and peak, the latter with two thick rows of gold foliate decoration. Like many officers in the last year of the war, Gen Effiong is wearing a new uniform made up by civilian tailors from issued 'duck-hunter' camouflage cloth. Because of shortages the buttons are cheap plastic, and the jacket is unlined. The collar bears red staff tabs, and the gold badges of his rank are embroidered on drab green slides slipped over the shoulder straps. Straight-legged trousers have internal hip pockets, and are worn over black civilian shoes.

H2: Petty Officer, Biafran Navy, 1968

This petty officer is part of the crew of one of the gunboats which made up the improvised Navy. He is wearing one of the helmets made in Biafran workshops from thin sheet metal, shaped into this style favoured by construction and oilfield workers in the 1960s; while it gave little or no ballistic protection, it was widely worn by the Biafran Army. His white shirt has black buttons, and on his left sleeve below the national patch is a black-printed rating badge of an eagle above crossed 'foul' anchors. The rest of his uniform is a mix of surplus items: a pair of ex-British tropical shorts, a Royal Navy stable belt, and French canvas patrol boots. Several Biafran naval crew were seen armed with Czech CZ-25 sub-machine guns, one of Biafra's early purchases in spring 1967.

H3: Lieutenant, Biafran Air Force, 1969

The uniforms of the tiny Biafran Air Force, like its aircraft, were sourced from a variety of suppliers. This pilot is wearing a grey-green cotton US-style garrison cap with the BAF's brass badge on the left front **(see inset)**. His jungle-green Aertex-type shirt has dark blue slides on its shoulder straps, bearing two six-point silver stars above 'BIAFRA AIR FORCE' stitched in silver thread. Both his jungle-green trousers with pleated cargo pockets and his cut-down jungle boots come from US Army surplus suppliers. In keeping with the aged aircraft, his flying helmet is an obsolete RAF model.



The controversial Biafran commander Col Joseph 'Hannibal' Achuzie, wearing the peaked cap and collar tabs of his staff rank with a 'duck-hunter' camouflage jacket (compare with Plate H1). Achuzie was an engineer and former Militia officer who transferred to the regular army, and earned a reputation as a stubborn fighter and a severe disciplinarian. After the loss of Onitsha in late September 1967 he was promoted major to command 11th Bn; he linked up east of the city with Col Nsudoh's 18th Bn, and launched a successful pincer movement that drove the Federal 2nd Div out with heavy casualties. Given command of the 11th Div (11th, 12th & 18th Bns) in January 1968, Col Achuzie managed to hold Onitsha until late March, nearly losing his life in the final fighting, and in May he commanded the besieged garrison of Port Harcourt. In March 1969 he was given temporary command of 'S' Div to attack the Federal 16th Bde in Owerri, but was driven back. Finally, when Gen Effiong became president on 9 January 1970, Col Achuzie briefly commanded all remaining Biafran troops. It has been said that the successes his soldiers achieved were often due to the fact that they feared his wrath more than they feared the enemy. (Private collection)

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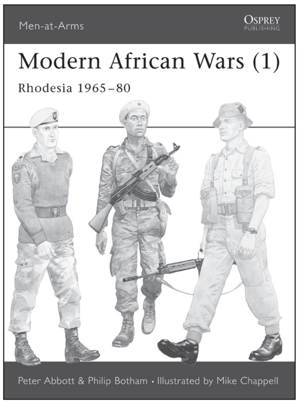
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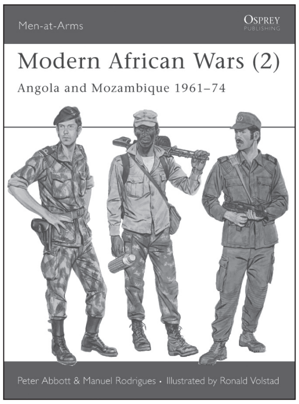
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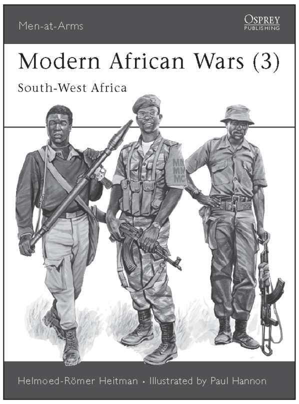
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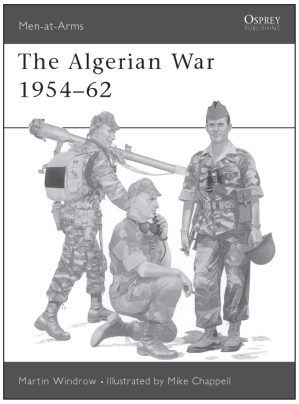
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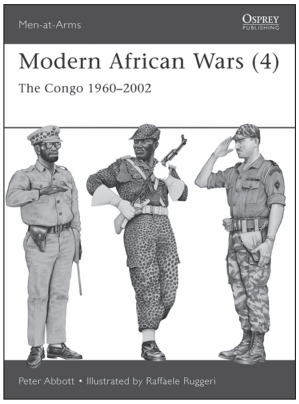
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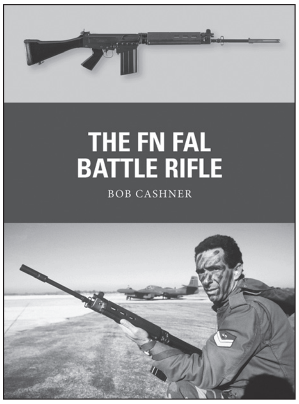
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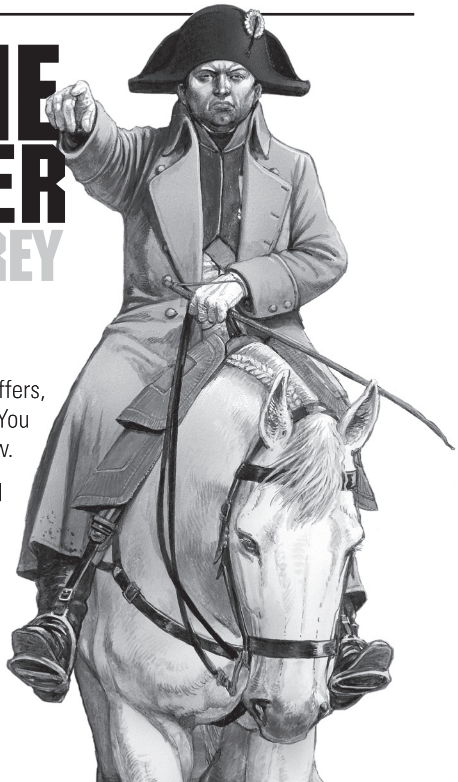

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